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ONE HORIZON

Many readers will know that the name George Borodin conceals the identity of one of our most celebrated Harley Street surgeons. The son of a Russian prince, one-time naval cadet and now a pioneer of the latest developments of plastic surgery, George Borodin has packed much excitement and significance into his forty-odd years of life.

In ONE HORIZON he tells of his travels round the world since the end of the recent war—England, the United States, Hawaii, the South Sea Islands, Australia, Java, Iraq, and back to England. And wherever he went the wind of adventure was always in George Borodin's face. Operating on a peritonitis case in a tramp-steamer on the storm-tossed Atlantic, shark-hunting in the South Seas, kidnapped by Iraqi bandits—all these and a hundred other experiences are related by the author in that easy, urbane style that has won him so wide a circle of readers.

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ONE HORIZON

BY
GEORGE BORODIN



T. WERNER LAURIE LTD.,
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PROLOGUE

Not long ago a book critic, pausing in his work of praise and perdition, indulged in a flight of fancy. He imagined he had before him some of the books he would be reviewing in the year 1960. It gave him an opportunity of giving added edge to his current judgment of literary reputations, and it was well laced with a pungent and, at times, acidic wit. And he wrote, among other and more weighty things these words, which, since I am human, a doctor, and an author, and therefore egocentric, immediately caught my eye: "Among the books on my table there is a thin, modest little pamphlet by George Borodin. It is entitled *Places I Have Never Seen*. Those who expect the thick, lavishly illustrated sort of volume that usually bears the name of this writer will be disappointed, for this is, without question, the shortest of all the many books Mr. Borodin has written. The reason for this is as plain as a pikestaff: the world is small, and Mr. Borodin's capacity and achievement in travel are large. Rather the wonder is that his list of unvisited places can be extended even to the tenuities of these few pages . . ."

He pointed out that the list included the Pacific Islands, no doubt feeling that since the voyages of doctors in general and surgeons in particular usually take them to the populated parts of the world, where there are hospitals and universities and conferences, these lands were likely to remain forever outside my orbit.

At the time he was right. Not only had I never visited the Pacific Islands but there seemed little likelihood of my ever doing so. But in the event it has come to it that he was merely exercising the inalienable right of literary critics to be utterly wrong when making prophecies. If ever I write the book he assigned to me—and I trust that it will be even shorter than he imagined it—the Pacific Islands will not figure in the list of places I have never seen. For I have been there—or,

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since there is so great a multitude of them, shall I say that I have been to some of them? And in so doing, I have fulfilled one more of those ambitions which, unbeknown to the prescient critic, I have long aspired in my secret heart.

It seems that I must have been born under a waning star—a star whose journeys could not be prognosticated with the mathematical precision that applies to planets. Moreover, it is a star that likes its light to shine into the darker and more remote corners of the earth. It has led me already into strange places and the company of even stranger men; and I hope that for as long as I live it will go on leading me and that I shall have the breath and strength to follow.

That star has dragged its willing, earth-bound subject through most of the towns and villages of Europe, and when it had drawn me to London it seemed as though its power was waning a little. I became “established,” as the phrase goes. I acquired professional and family ties. And, in all conscience, London is vast enough, protean enough, to provide adventures and experiences for a life time. It has given them to me in full measure, as I have told elsewhere, and I am grateful to it.

But, for all that, London is a city, a great capital; and superficially at least the great capitals of the world are much alike. There are moments which sometimes come to one with the force of inner revelation when one wants to be free of it all, when the life of the towns seems to be like the frenzies of the hot and swing bands they affect: ceaseless and desperate efforts to deck out and disguise a fundamentally monotonous rhythm of four-in-a-bar.

It is then that the spirit begins to whisper, crying a plague on all this civilization, with its formalities and its artificialities, its purposeless restlessness and its boring diversions. It is then that the forgotten places beckon with an alluring nod and smile, and the vision of life, uninhibited and unexploited, comes to one.

But where, in this shrinking earth, are such spots to be found? The airways span the world. The movie camera peers everywhere, turning the very coral islands into Technicolor paradises, while the exploiter sees in every lagoon a potential Palm Beach. And what is the point in voyaging thousands of miles only to

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be greeted with the same familiar cocktails and entertained by displays of "native dancing and music," organized and presented with the slick, soulless—and meaningless—efficiency of a Hollywood super-musical chorus?

That, perhaps, is a pessimistic view. Perhaps, too, it is a compensation and consolation to the lazy and unadventurous who wish to find an excuse not to travel. But it is not true. It is undeniable that the arm of "civilization" is long and has reached far and wide; yet even today it is not all-embracing, and there are places where it has not yet stretched.

Moreover, so much depends upon the frame of mind, whether one voyages to the edges of the world or merely stays in one's own country. The person whose eyes look for nothing but the luxury hotel and the jazz band, the cocktail bar and the bathing beach, will see nothing else—and can find them where he will. His vision is blind to all else. But he to whom every journey, even if it be only a run from London to the coast, is an exploration will never fail to find something odd, fresh, beautiful and exciting, to add variety and spice to his existence.

Those lazy and unadventurous people whom I just mentioned cannot believe this. That is why they look on the world as, nowadays, the same everywhere—and also why they ask me often, with a superior air that is also vaguely insinuating, whether the experiences I have related at various times "really happened." To them, the world has ceased to hold any sort of adventure. Travel is an affair of smoothly ordered time-tables, and one makes up one's mind in advance exactly what it is one is going to see and what experiences one is going to have. Is it, therefore, abnormal that commercially-minded promoters should see to it that these expectations are fulfilled?

The way to travel is not merely, in the Stevensonian phrase, to travel hopefully, but also to travel with open eyes and ears, with a readiness (perhaps almost an eagerness) to talk and make friends, and to accept anything that may happen as precisely that for which one set out. One must be free of inhibitions and restraints. If one journeys about the world in that spirit one can rely upon finding that adventure and curious experiences are not things of the past that exist only in the minds of romancers. But one must not be surprised, hurt, shocked or insulted, if

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feeling of ennui and exhaustion, a desire to be some other where. If I was a coward to want at once to escape from its grisly aftermath, then at least I was but one coward among millions. The long-cherished plans emerged again into the light of day, and with a new, forceful, insistence. In my mind's eye I saw myself flying or sailing or even paddling in a canoe among those islands. I was convinced that the time had come at last—so convinced, in fact, that I already fell to planning my outfit and my itinerary, in broad outline, for I do not believe in the organized, closely regulated tour.

But there was one thing I had overlooked. If the war was over, many of its restrictions remained. The world, I was told, was short of shipping. There were millions of men to restore to their homelands. There were goods to be imported and exported. And even when the bulk of the armies and the navies and the air forces had come back, there would still be occupying forces that had to be fed and supplied with all the paraphernalia that the modern fighting services need.

The Ministry of War Transport poured cold, practical, official water on my glowing vision. Perhaps in two years . . . then there might be a tramp steamer on which they might find a berth for me . . .

Two years ! And even that two years was edged about with bureaucratic "mights" and "it would appears" and the like. I would have lief as heard a life sentence from a scarlet robed judge of assize.

It was outrageous, I decided, the wrath in me knowing no bounds. I was not to be waved aside by a mere gesture of a Government Department. What did they, immersed in their forms and returns and analyses, know of such high matters as the call of wanderlust in the soul ? The Ministry of Food would not allow men's bodies to die of starvation. Was the Ministry of War Transport so lightly to kill man's spirit ?

There is one English proverb that, though it contains much wisdom, always seems to me a little odd. It says that there are more ways of killing a cat than by hanging it. That is a strange saying for a people who seem to me to have taken the cat to their hearts more than any other nation, and who would rather sometimes ill-treat their children than be cruel to animals.

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But it was with the truth of the proverb and not with its oddity that I was concerned. Adventures come only to the adventurous, and he who does not ask is not likely to receive.

I trained my guns and decided on a shot at long range. Taking up my pen, I wrote a letter. But it was no appeal to the Ministry for a reconsideration of their decision, no personal plaint directed to the Prime Minister. Firmly at the head of my letter I wrote : "To the Administration of War Transport, Washington, D.C., U.S.A."

It was not a long letter, for I know the Americans to be a business-like people who have a suspicion of undue prolixity. I explained that I was a surgeon and an author, and that I wished to visit America and the Pacific Islands so that I could see their hospitals and medical services, and try to interpret them to Europe. Could they help me in the difficult matter of transport ? Their resources were so big and what I asked was so little. I signed myself "your obedient servant"—a touch of old-world British courtesy that, I felt, might soften the more romantic heart of American officialdom. If I had been honest I would have written "yours hopefully," but that is by the way.

And then I waited with such patience as I could command—which is not much, for patience is not a virtue with which I am strongly endowed. But I felt that my appeal would not go unanswered. Indeed, I felt that the Great Adventure had already begun, and that I could already feel beneath my feet the rise and fall of the ship as it nosed its way through the long swell of the Pacific. . . .

CHAPTER I

I Began as a Patient

Whatever the decision of the American authorities on my application might be, they could do nothing to help me on this side of the Atlantic. They might—so I dreamed in my wilder moments—offer me a passage tomorrow and map out an itinerary that would take me to the islands of my desire—but while there were some three thousand miles of sea between the United States and myself, the most generous proposal would be worth nothing.

So, right from the start, there was a problem to solve—but that is how I like it. Things that go too smoothly are, in my experience, to be suspected. “Well begun is half done” may be a good saying. So far as I am concerned I prefer to think of the warnings about flattering to deceive.

It is curious that in an age which prides itself on the development of its communications—an age which has given us the high-speed turbine ship and the jet-aeroplane—one of the most difficult of all things to do is to make arrangements to go from one place to another. It is no overstatement to say that for every hour one spends on an air journey one has probably wasted a week in trying to book a seat. Perhaps time, which cures all things, will eventually modify this sad state of affairs as well. It will be good news for travellers like myself when it does so.

And it was indeed a happy circumstance that I kept that idea about good beginnings “flattering to deceive” in the front of my mind. I made inquiries about an air crossing, well aware of all the difficulties and delays, and prepared for the worst. To my astonishment my luck seemed to be right in. Yes, I could have a passage in early January . . . it was incredible. Quite frankly, I felt at first that the American newspaper correspondent in London who had interested himself on my behalf was pulling my leg when he gave me this news. Others who had applied long before I had even thought of the matter were

still waiting with that kind of resigned patience which, in a less enlightened world, used to be regarded as an infallible indication of sainthood.

Now if I had taken that passage, this story would have had a very different beginning in more ways than one. I should have travelled in comfort in the early part of January and arrived in New York sixteen hours later. There would have been no stirring (and for me, trying) overture, for I should have entered America in the way that so many other people do. But that was not to be. The odd destiny which rules that I shall attain my ambitions makes it a condition that I shall never take the direct route to them; and a destiny of this sort is not to be denied.

Only fools, I suppose, fail to take advantage of good luck when it comes to them. But then Fortune is never so much suspect as when she smiles—in my experience. And fools, I suppose, are the only people who do not keep their mouths shut about good fortune. Which means that if I had not gone about rejoicing aloud at the gift of this passage my voyage to the Americas would have been quite uneventful and ordinary.

The reason why it was not so was—a woman. That woman was a patient of mine. But perhaps that is not explicit enough, and the tale is worth telling, though whether it redounds to my credit or discredit, I can express no judgment. For no one is so blind to his own folly as the fool.

Amongst my patients at that time was a well-known English actress, and it was she who was the *dea ex machina*. I had performed an operation on her—a serious one—and she was making a sound, but slow, recovery. It was, as I have said, January—and January is not the most delightful of months in England, especially when viewed through the eyes of a convalescent.

The English climate being what it is, a protean thing beside which a woman's whims look like mathematical probabilities, there are on occasions Januaries that are mild and springlike, when the doctor can view the problems of his convalescent patients with a certain degree of satisfaction. But this was not one of them. It was cold—exceptionally cold. It was damp—but no one can say that damp in England is exceptional. It was, in fact, just the kind of weather that I should have described

I BEGAN AS A PATIENT

as utterly unsuitable for a patient in the state of this charming actress. What she wanted was warmth and sunshine, a place where her body could recuperate and her spirit could aid that recuperation by being glad and happy. But the doctor does not work under laboratory conditions where he can control such factors as temperature and humidity to suit the needs of his patients. He has to take things as he finds them and make the best of them.

In this case, however, the loss was not merely a negative one. The patient had less incentive to accept conditions than one who saw no chance of escape. She had friends in America—good friends whom she had made during one of her visits to the States—and they had been distressed at her operation. Gallantly they had come to the rescue. Let my patient go to them, they urged, and spend a few weeks in the sunshine of Florida at their house, and all would be well. All would indeed have been well—but for that patient, as for myself, there were those three thousand miles of ocean. And at this end of the line there was a queue of would-be travellers extending, so I sometimes thought, for a further three thousand miles.

The offer was made in a spirit of commendable generosity. Yet in one way it was unfortunate. It caused my patient to fret unduly and rail against the cruelty of the English January. There, she thought, is the sunshine and warmth I need. It is waiting for me. Yet it just as well might not exist. Continually she was comparing the dank bleakness of the reality with conditions as they might so easily have been had transport affairs been easier. Needless to say, this worrying did her no good, but there was nothing to be done about it—or so I thought at the time.

It was at this stage I forgot that silence is golden.

Only a few days before the date of my departure by air I called at the nursing home to bid her goodbye.

"Now don't get worried," I said reassuringly. "You can have every confidence in Dr. Black"—he was going to look after a few of my patients for me—"and you'll soon be well, anyway."

I spoke like this because I thought she looked troubled. She was troubled—but the change of doctor was not the reason as was soon evident, somewhat to my humiliation.

"Oh, it isn't that," she replied, shaking her head. "I know Dr. Black very well indeed. He's a thoroughly good man. I was just wondering why you doctors are all so incurably optimistic—but there, I suppose you have to be. Hope's the best medicine in the world, isn't it? I was just wondering," she went on, turning a lugubrious face to the window, "how anyone can expect to get well in this climate. Cold—rain—fog. What's the good of getting well in it, anyway?"

"Come, come," I exclaimed, "you mustn't talk like that . . ."

"Oh, George!" she cried—she always used my christian name—"do stop trying to put over that bedside-manner talk on me! Can't you see that I'm envious? Yes, plain, selfish, envious. I can't help thinking of that place in Florida. I could get well so quickly there. And you'll be flying to America in a couple of days' time. It's—it's heart-breaking."

I did not know quite what to say. Put that way, it did seem a little selfish of me.

"They grow oranges in Florida, don't they?" she asked plaintively.

I agreed, though I did not see what it had to do with the matter.

"I expect you'll get a passage soon," I said reassuringly, though I was aware myself of the doubt in my voice.

She shook her head, and then turned large, mournful eyes on me—the sort of look, in fact, that can be very devastating to the sentimental Russian soul.

"Listen, George," she said in a low, vibrant voice. "Couldn't you wait a little while and let me have your booking? After all, it doesn't mean life or death to you—and that's practically what it means to me. You wouldn't like to have one of your patients die on you, would you? You've said yourself that a little sunshine is what I need to get well—and now it's you who're standing in the way . . ."

I looked at her. This was one of the few occasions in which I found myself tongue-tied.

"Besides," she went on with that malevolent turning of one's words against oneself which women call logic, and which is so utterly unanswerable, "you've just said it wouldn't be long before I got a passage, so you wouldn't be delayed very much if we exchanged, would you?"

"Well, I don't know—" I said slowly.

She was quick to detect that she had me virtually at her mercy.

"Of course, I don't want to seem entirely selfish," she went on. "I've a special reason for wanting to get well quickly. You see, S."—she named a well-known Broadway producer—"wants me in his new play, but I shall have to turn down the contract if I'm not fit enough to begin rehearsals at the end of February. Think of it from that point of view, George. There's more in it than the pleading of a selfish woman. Think of the dollars I should earn for this country and . . ."

I held up my hand.

"You win," I said, trying to be gracious and magnanimous, though, Heaven knows, I felt neither. "You shall have my booking. I'll ring up about it the moment I get back to my rooms. I suppose you're right. Think of how proud I shall be—a new Sir Walter Raleigh, or was it Sir Philip Sidney? 'Thy need is greater than mine.' " I laughed, trying to pass it off as lightly as I could. "Perhaps one day a distinguished deputation will wait upon me for saving the life of an ornament to the British and American stages."

She smiled and took my hand in hers. Her eyes were even softer and more liquid than before.

"Thank you, George," she said softly. "I knew you wouldn't let me down. You were always more of a friend to me than a doctor."

I said goodbye with renewed promises to make arrangements about the reservation, and I was so puffed out at my own generosity that I quite failed to notice two things until I was almost back at my rooms in Harley Street.

The first was the ambiguity of her final remark. Thought of in cold blood, it had two meanings, one of which was not very complimentary to my professional skill. The other was that I suddenly remembered the last play in which I had seen her in the West End—a play the title of which I have forgotten. In that, I recalled with a sudden, blinding light, she had just such an appeal from the couch of sickness. It was a humiliating thought that I had been made the victim of a professional trick, and try as I might to explain the circumstance away by telling myself that the great actor is always playing a part, though

barely conscious of it at the time, I could not help feeling a little bitter and resentful.

By then, of course, reaction was setting in. I saw myself no longer as a new Sir Philip Sidney, but as a fool—even an adjectival fool. My dreams were dissolving away again. America had come almost within my grasp, to speak figuratively, and I had let it go, merely because a woman had turned large, expressive eyes on me and spoken in a pleading voice. But I had given my promise and could not take it back now. I tried to console myself with the thought that I was, after all, Russian in origin, and that there are times when the true Russian likes being made a fool of by a pretty face and a charming manner. It was clear, however, that my secretary could never be persuaded to take the view that I had acted nobly and solely from a sense of duty to a patient in need. The look she gave me when I told her to make the arrangements for the transfer was even more expressive, though far less flattering, than any of the glances my actress-patient had cast at me.

There was no time for regrets, however. The problem I had thought solved had reappeared in a new form. The argument that I might have my patient's reservation later on was utterly specious, for the likelihood of its maturing was remote. My American friend, who, as a journalist and an American journalist at that, was completely unsentimental, would not be likely to give me a second chance when I had thrown the first away so casually. Whatever I did, I should have to do on my own.

Once again I made a round of inquiries, but the answers were like the old game of counting the cherry stones: "this year, next year, sometime, never"; and the stress fell, I thought, on the last word. America had become for me like the El Dorado of the Spanish conquerors: a remote land of gorgeous promise that receded ever into the mist of distance. And then I saw the solution. It came to me like a flash of inspiration. Surely this could not fail.

I would work my passage as a ship's surgeon. It was stupid of me not to have thought of it before. And as I made up my mind that this was the only conceivable course, I reflected grimly that it was not likely any woman, no matter how great

her need, would want to change places with me in that sort of position.

This time it seemed as though the position I had previously known had turned completely on its head. So far from there being no room at all, it appeared that the Merchant Navy had an insatiable appetite for ships' surgeons, especially for those who did not care overmuch what sort of conditions they were offered. The only thing that mattered to me was the date. I had made up my mind that I must be in America at the earliest possible moment, and if the choice had lain between a tramp sailing the next day and the *Queen Elizabeth* sailing a month later, I would unhesitatingly have chosen the former. Perhaps I had an uneasy feeling at the back of my mind that I must cheat fate by getting out of the country without delay, for the longer I tarried, the more were the chances of my being again held up.

So it was that I signed ships' articles on s.s. *Treetop Towers*. I do not know what inspired her original owners to confer that name on her, for she had not a suspicion of the nursery-tale charm that it suggests. She was, so I was informed, thirty years old—that is to say, she had been built during the 1914-1918 war, when the emphasis, as in this last one, had been more on the utmost output from the shipyards than on individual quality in the craft they built. And she had seen a lot of service. The scars that she bore were no doubt honourable ones ; but for all that they were scars, and they did not create a very favourable first impression.

January is not, I believe, the ideal month for crossing the Atlantic in any conditions. Certainly this trip in an aged ship intended to carry refrigerated meat cargoes on the South Atlantic run was not likely to be anything of a luxury cruise. To make matters even less attractive, she was to steam in ballast. The export drive had not got into swing, and there were, it seemed, no goods for us to send across the water to the United States. And the company was certain to be restricted. This was decidedly not the sort of ship the lavish U.S. Government would charter for the transport of G.I. brides.

I am not a politician. I am only a doctor, and I have a proper humility in my approach to affairs of State. Yet for all that these circumstances puzzled me a great deal, and I have no

doubt that they puzzle others as well. On the one side, we are told that the world's need, and this country's need in particular, is for more and more shipping space. If we want to travel, we are told there are no berths available. Thousands of people are daily besieging the offices of airlines and shipping companies and agents, asking to be allowed to rejoin their families or their friends and not caring what sort of accommodation they get so long as it gives them transport. Yet here was s.s. *Treetop Towers*, old, uncomfortable, and not built for the passenger trade, but for all that seaworthy, about to cross the Atlantic with nothing on board more useful than a couple of thousand tons of useless ballast; and she was by no means an exception. This seems to me an incredible paradox. The goods pile up on the wharves for lack of export space; the queues at the ticket offices grow longer; yet these ships set out on their useless errands. Perhaps now conditions are better. One must hope so, for it is not everyone who can be as lucky as I and sign on as a ship's surgeon.

For lucky I did think myself at that time. The rusted hull of s.s. *Treetop Towers*, her elongated, antique-looking superstructure, the dull thud-thud of her reciprocating engines, these were of no avail, they uttered no warning to me; I looked upon her, with the glamour of success at last upon me, as the ark that would bear me safely to my promised land—or, rather, to the gateway of my promised land.

The complement of the ship was seventy-two, and there was a passenger list of twenty-three, composed in the main of people who had pulled innumerable wires and refused to be gainsaid by the eternal "no" of officials. They had all but forced their way on board the ship. I think her captain, one Thomas Morris, resented their presence a little. On the cargo ship passengers are always apt to be something of a trial, for so often their notions of sea travel are based on what they have read of luxury transatlantic liners, and they expect all ships to conform to that standard.

That, however, was his affair. Mine was to keep this miscellaneous assortment of ninety-five human beings whole and sound in mind and body. It did not appear, on the face of it, a very formidable task—but then I had never before crossed

the Atlantic in January on a tramp steamer in ballast. Moreover, I told myself, it would not be for long. In ordinary circumstances, the ship, which, despite her age, had quite a turn of speed, should be over in nine days, and the laws of probability did not suggest that ninety-five people could, in nine days, produce more medical problems than were capable of simple solution. The work of the average general practitioner is far more onerous than that.

Perhaps the glamour was still in my eyes. If it was, it was soon blown away. The s.s. *Treetop Towers* was due to sail from Belfast, where I reported in good time. The crossing to Northern Ireland had not been too bad, but on the day that s.s. *Treetop Towers* cast off her moorings, what I considered a violent storm was raging, and I mentally questioned the wisdom of putting to sea at all in such weather—though wisely I kept my misgivings to myself.

That storm set the key for the whole of the next twelve days. As each tempestuous night dawned darkly into another stormy day, all hopes of a nine-day crossing vanished. The seas were too high and the ship too light for anything more than five knots to be attempted. More than that, the captain told the passengers with a somewhat malicious air, as though he secretly enjoyed giving them bad news, that it would probably lead to the ship's breaking up, and he explained that he was too old to start losing his ship.

So we ploughed on beneath clouds that were like a solid ceiling, and with seas battering us unremittingly. As ship's surgeon, I was not finding the voyage unduly arduous. Of course, everyone was ill—with sea-sickness ; but that is not something which a ship's surgeon can consider a major preoccupation. For some days I held out against it, trying to show a lofty superiority. But eventually *mal-de-mer* won, and I paid for my temerity in trying not to submit. There is nothing, I think, that can be more properly compared to the worst tortures of hell.

As the days wore on, and the weather seemed, if anything, to be getting worse, there were signs of disquiet among the passengers ; and perhaps, now that it is all over, the ship's surgeon may also confess to having felt some qualms, quite apart from those of sea-sickness. But they found no confirmation

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for their anxieties in anything the dour captain Morris did or said. On the contrary, he was assurance and reassurance itself. Had he not himself commanded this ship for fifteen of her thirty years' life, and brought her successfully through weather beside which this was merely a slight discomfort? Had not the ship herself defied for three decades not only the normal risks of the sea but also the hazards which men in two wars had provided for the seafarer? He did not, perhaps, put it in those words precisely, though as he was a Cardiff man he had a rich and expressive manner of speech when he so desired. But the lesson to him was plain. Under his command, s.s. *Treetop Towers* could bring no harm to either her crew or her passengers.

We felt comforted—to a certain extent—but whatever sense of safety the captain might have instilled in us quickly evaporated the next day. The radio had picked up an SOS. Other ships it seemed had not the innate sturdiness of our own nor the confident handling of a Captain Morris. The message was appalling in its stark simplicity. It ran: "Am breaking up fast. Three of four lifeboats swept away. Can keep afloat twelve hours at most." The position was added.

The captain looked grave, as well he might. He had a terrible decision to make—whether to risk his own ship in an attempt to give aid to the sinking Liberty ship or let her face her own fate. Yet it was only to the landsman that there appeared any real dilemma. To him, as to any master in his position, there was only one answer to the question. He must do what he could.

Quietly, and as though it was the most ordinary thing in the world, he gave his orders. The ship was put on a new course. The speed was raised to twelve knots. That was the gravest risk we had to take, for we were courting disaster by trying to make that speed in those conditions. But unless it were done, we might as well have continued on our original course. Even at twelve knots we might not arrive in time to be of any help.

The wind grew stronger, for now we seemed to be steaming into the very teeth of it, and the seas ran higher than ever before. The crash of breaking china, which had hitherto punctuated our voyage, ceased; there was nothing more left to break.

For a couple of days now no hot meals had been served, but no one seemed to mind. The majority were too ill and uncomfortable to worry about food.

As a doctor, I never cease to wonder at every fresh manifestation I encounter of the control that psychological factors exercise on physical conditions. There, I feel, is a rich field into which research might dig with ever-increasing profit—and so far we have, let it be admitted, hardly begun to scratch the surface. Here, in this ship hastening at her own peril to the succour of others desperately placed, were yet more examples to add to the many I have recorded in my professional career.

There can be no doubt that the storm was more furious than ever, and that the ship, at her increased speed, was developing a complicated motion that was almost unendurable. At the time we had changed course for the sinking ship, the majority of the passengers had been sea-sick to a greater or less degree. But now, in that atmosphere of fear and tension, the signs and symptoms vanished as though by magic. Only one thing mattered: could we reach the sinking ship in time? All else was trivial, and personal inconveniences, like sea-sickness, were luxuries not to be thought of in such circumstances. It was as though, through having a strong common purpose, our separate minds had become fused into a single one with greater powers of control than each possessed by itself. It is, of course, a common phenomenon seen often during the late war—on the battlefields and in the air-raid shelters, for example. But for all that it never fails to strike me afresh each time I encounter it.

That night I do not think any of us so much as tried to sleep. The success of our mission had become a personal matter to each, and every one of us would have been saddened and distressed if we had failed. Dawn came, but it was more a dilution of the night than any burst of daylight. White-capped seas raged round the ship, which shuddered and shook herself repeatedly. I wondered if it was only my overwrought imagination that made it seem to me that she was growing weary and less resilient to the onset of those mighty waves.

It was just after eight o'clock that we sighted the wreck. She was still afloat, though only just so, and she was sinking fast. The first part of our task was over, but what good had

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that nightmare journey been? It was a question I could not help asking myself. We had still to make contact with the men on the sinking ship, and that appeared to me beyond human courage and skill. No small boat could live amongst those waves—and how else, than by launching a lifeboat, could we so much as make a show of rescue?

But I had reckoned without the unquenchable spirit of the British sailor. This was the first time I had seen it at its height; and in one sense I hope it will also be the last, for I never wish to live through another occasion of this kind. Yet I am glad that I witnessed it, for it showed me how man can rise superior to all angers and material considerations if the call to do so be loud and clear enough, and, without faith in that ability, there can be no future for mankind. And it is precisely that faith which wilts and grows dim in modern civilization, with its emphasis on material advantage and security.

To me there was something almost frightening in the calm way in which they went to work. The boat was lowered—but there was no suggestion that it was a hazardous, indeed almost hopeless, task. It was done with care and with the air of men who realise that they have a difficult task to perform, yet for all that a task well within their capabilities. The ship rolled and pitched so that at one moment the boat was swinging clear of the sides, like a swing-boat at a fun-fair, and a moment later it crashed back so that it was threatened with instant destruction. But—I will not say “somehow or other,” for that implies chance and it seemed to me there was no chance about this superb piece of work—the boat was got away. We watched it, an insignificant speck now being thrown mountains high, now disappearing into the mighty troughs between the waves. And each time it disappeared we, the watchers, held our breath, never expecting to see it again.

I have read many tales of rescues at sea. They have always appealed to me for their undertone of quiet, determined heroism. But I never imagined that the reality could be like this. There was little noise beyond the roar of the storm—nothing but grim determination based on a quiet, yet complete, self assurance. Perhaps never again shall I see the bright light of man's spirit shine out so clearly.

Completed once, that journey to and from the sinking ship would have seemed to me an achievement worthy of a Homeric epic. But these men crossed and re-crossed ; and on each return journey they brought with them some more of those who must have thought that, at last, the sea had proved their master. So it went on—a grim battle between insignificant yet dauntless man on the one hand and the titanic forces of enraged nature on the other.

For six hours the fight continued. And every minute of those hours was a hard struggle. The storm did not abate at all to give those hard-pressed men a respite. Each journey to and from was as perilous as its predecessors and was to be no less hazardous than those which followed. But in the end it was done, and by four o'clock in the grey afternoon the last man had been taken off the sinking ship and the s.s. *Treetop Towers*, giving a last valedictory whistle, turned about and resumed her proper course at her former leisurely speed.

Never had men more richly earned the reward of rest than those who toiled so unremittingly all that morning and afternoon, but for them there was to be no leisure. The storm was still raging and showed no signs of having blown itself out ; and the ship had to be worked. They returned to their normal routine, as though the whole of that day had been no more than an interlude.

Throughout the rescue I had been no more than a helpless spectator, but as soon as the rescued were brought on board I found myself in for a busy time. Each man had to be examined, for all had been through great hardship. But, with one exception, there was nothing demanding my professional skill. I ordered rest and restoratives for them, and then turned to the one case that looked serious.

Curiously, this was a man who had never left our ship. He had been handling the boat's ropes from a position on deck, when a great wave, crashing over the bow, had caught him and almost swept him overboard. He had clutched wildly at the stanchion and had then been thrown back. In coming down to the deck he had impaled himself on a spike, which had passed right through his stomach. To make matters worse he had not been noticed until almost the end of the proceedings. The

officers had been too busy with other things to keep a constant check on each individual member of the crew.

The captain stood by while I made a thorough examination of the boy—he could not have been more than nineteen years of age; and he eyed me anxiously as I looked up. I made no attempt to hide the gravity of the situation.

“It’s serious,” I said. “The internal injuries are quite extensive. What he needs is an emergency abdominal operation.”

The captain shrugged his shoulders slightly. “Go ahead,” he said briefly. “You’re a surgeon.”

“Yes,” I said, a little bitterly, “I’m a surgeon, all right—but how can I operate in a case like that without an assistant or an anæsthetist?” Even in the grimmest days of the London blitz I had always had those aids.

“O.K., doc.,” he said calmly. “I’ll assist you, and the chief steward can give the anæsthetic.”

I looked at him sharply, barely knowing whether he was serious, sarcastic or merely trying to be funny. The look on his face checked the retort that rose to my lips. He was deadly serious, and I could make no comment on my doubts of the efficiency of the proposed help. Captain Morris had an air of determination, courage and self-confidence, that it would have taken a stronger man than I to defy. His whole manner suggested that he had been through worse occasions than this, not once but many times before, and only a fool of a landsman could think the task impossible.

Taking my acceptance of his proposal for granted, he called in the chief steward, and once again I was struck by this air of readiness to tackle any job, however tricky or unfamiliar it might be. I began a short talk on how the anæsthetic should be administered. Suddenly I stopped short, for the man was grinning widely.

“That’s all right, sir,” he said cheerfully. “It won’t be the first time I’ve stood in on that trick. Right though the war we never carried a surgeon, and I guess there were times when we felt we were just a bit too popular with Jerry’s *Kondors*.”

“I see,” I said, feeling somewhat humbled at the thought that these men had performed operations that I, a qualified man, would probably have declared impossible. “We’d better

get started then. The more time we lose, the less chance he has."

I was taken along to the sick-bay, and here I had a pleasant surprise. I had expected to find some dark hole selected for the purpose for the sole reason that no other or more useful purpose could be found for it. But it was not at all like that. On the contrary, it was a bright, airy little place with three berths, and there was quite a creditable and modern equipment of instruments.

We got the boy on the table and started work. So efficient was the help I received—I have known assistance of a lower standard in some hospitals in which I have operated—that under normal conditions there would have been no difficulty at all. The one problem was the continued and erratic motion of the ship outside. Often I had to break off at a delicate moment to steady myself or prevent myself from falling, and even Captain Morris had difficulties in keeping his balance. Under these circumstances, the time of one hour occupied by the operation was not at all discreditable, and I felt we had cause for mutual congratulation, though that grim "all-in-the-day's-work" look on the captain's face discouraged me from making any comment on the point. In silence I stitched the wound and helped to strap the patient to the berth.

Now it was the chief steward's turn to show another facet of his versatility. His duties as an anæsthetist finished, he automatically and without question took on the role of sick-bay attendant. His standard of nursing was high. Perhaps it had not the refinements one expects from a nurse in a hospital ashore, but it was highly efficient, learnt, no doubt, in the hard school of practical experience which teaches best of all.

This little surgical interlude, which had filled me with the gravest forebodings at the outset, had turned out remarkably well, and three days later it was clear that the patient had set his feet firmly on the path to recovery.

It was the twelfth day since we had left Belfast, and I, in common with the rest of the passengers, had practically forgotten what it was like to have a solid, motionless platform beneath one's feet and to look out on a horizon that did not rise and fall like a giant see-saw. At last conditions were

beginning to ease. For the first time we could go out on deck and drink in the cool, fresh air, which was like a cold shower after the stuffiness of being below battened hatches. No one—not even the skipper—would have said it was calm, and one could not walk the deck without gripping ropes or rails for safety. For all that, it was like release from prison.

Captain Morris smiled at me. "Nearly through," he remarked. "Two days more, and we'll tie up in New York. The worst is over, anyway."

Two more days! It was long enough in all conscience, yet it was for me at least something to which to look forward with a singing heart. After all the problems and trials I had had to face in my mad determination to get to America, my goal was only forty-eight hours away. Yet once it had been nearer than that, I reflected. Pan-American would have flown me there in sixteen hours. . . .

Whatever fate it may have been that I had outraged was, however, not yet appeased. For the passengers and crew, there were only those two more days to New York. But for me, so it was decreed, the Promised Land was not yet.

Sea-sickness, strain and unfamiliar hard living, uninterruptedly for twelve days, were taking their toll of me. Their combined effect was to re-open the gastric ulcer that has plagued me for some fifteen years. The first signs appeared on the thirteenth day—which, apart from all superstition, experience suggests is my unlucky one. Without warning, I began vomiting blood. With my knowledge of my own condition, I fell into the depths of despair, and I think that the mental anguish of that time was far worse than the physical suffering, though that was by no means inconsiderable. Obviously, I could not operate on myself—and if things went on as they were, it was more than doubtful if I should ever reach New York as a live man.

Helpless and hopeless, I lay on my bunk. My head spun. Slowly opening my eyes, I was suddenly aware that I was not alone. The chief steward was bending over me solicitously, and the captain was standing a little behind him. His face was grave. Clearly, during my semi-consciousness, he had taken the opportunity of examining me.

"No good beating about the bush, doc.," he said brusquely.

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"You'll never stand another two days of this."

He might have been a good emergency assistant at an operation, but he hardly won full marks for a tactful bedside manner. Luckily he was not giving me any information I did not already possess.

"No," I gasped weakly. "Only hope is that you'll operate on me, captain. I'll take the risk."

The ghost of a smile hovered over his mouth, "Well, if it came to that, I'd have a shot," he remarked calmly. "But I've got a better remedy. We've radioed the flying ambulance from St. John's, Newfoundland. That's only four hours' flying time away, so I guess she'll be along quite soon."

I nodded dumbly. There seemed no end to the resources of this highly competent man.

In my condition one loses all ideas of time, and it seemed to me only a few minutes later when the captain himself came to tell me that the flying ambulance had been sighted. Actually, I am told, it was three hours later, but I was beyond arguing over details of that kind. Helped by the chief steward, the captain strapped me on a stretcher and had me carried on deck. I looked upwards at the sky. Yes, there she was—a flying-boat, circling the ship, and flashing a signal with an Aldis lamp. She came down in the still choppy sea a bare two hundred yards from the ship.

The boat had already been got away in readiness, and under the personal supervision of the captain I was lowered gently into it, so that I scarcely felt any shock at all. He himself came down into the boat and just before I was lifted into the flying-boat he grasped my hand.

"So long, doc.," he said gruffly. "I'll hope to see you again some day." He paused. "Thanks for what you did. It was a grand job on that boy."

It was the first and only time he had ever referred to the operation.

The flying-boat made a perfect take-off from the rough sea, and I was barely aware of it. It was more comfortable in the air than on the water, though conditions were very bumpy and the cabin was a little cramped. The two uniformed male nurses who had charge of me spoke little, but they knew their

job, and in a little while I had dozed off into something between sleep and coma.

At five o'clock on the twenty-fourth of January I was in a hospital bed at St. John's. Somewhere on the grey seas the s.s. *Treetop Towers* was ploughing her way towards New York, and, ill though I was, I could not help regretting that I was unable to see out the trip with her.

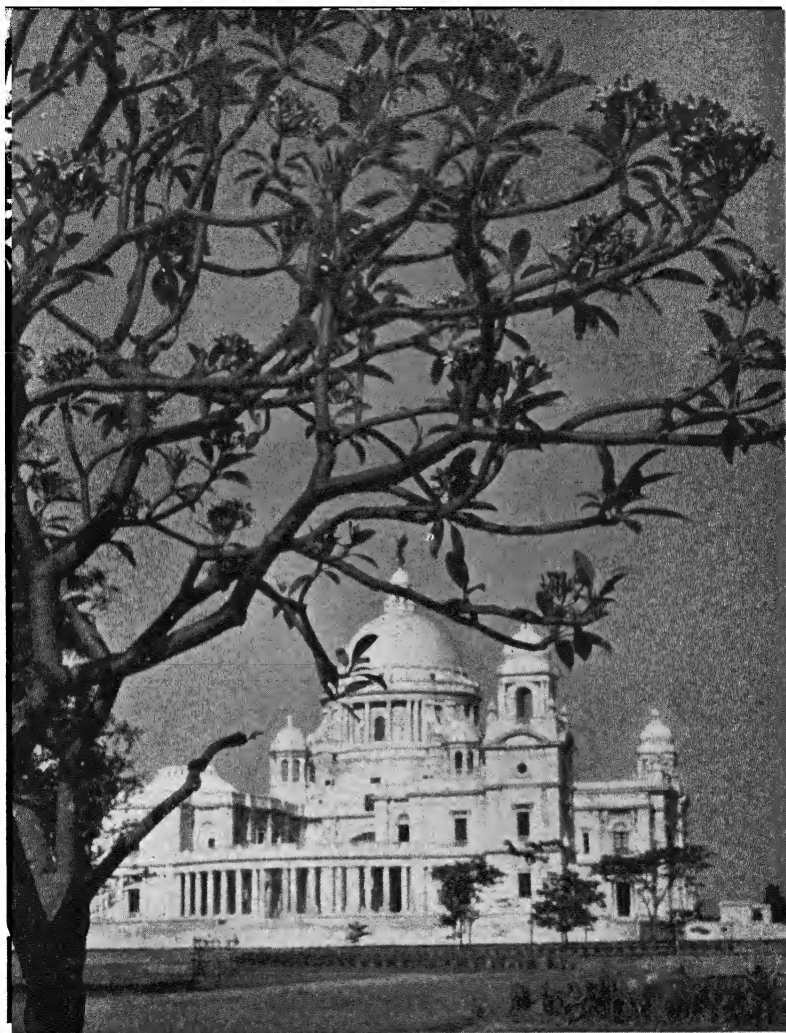
It was not long before I found that I had fallen among friends. I had had something to do with the health authorities of St. John's already—though not as an emergency patient. A few months before the war broke out in 1939 I had been offered a post as surgeon in this very hospital—an offer I had seriously entertained. Indeed, it was only the outbreak of war and the greater need of my services in England that dictated my refusal. I had not been forgotten.

No sooner had the name of the patient been transmitted to the chief surgeon than he came at once to see me and greet me as an old friend. Nor did he come alone, for he brought with him the chairman of the hospital and one of their principal physicians. In other circumstances it might have been called a committee of welcome.

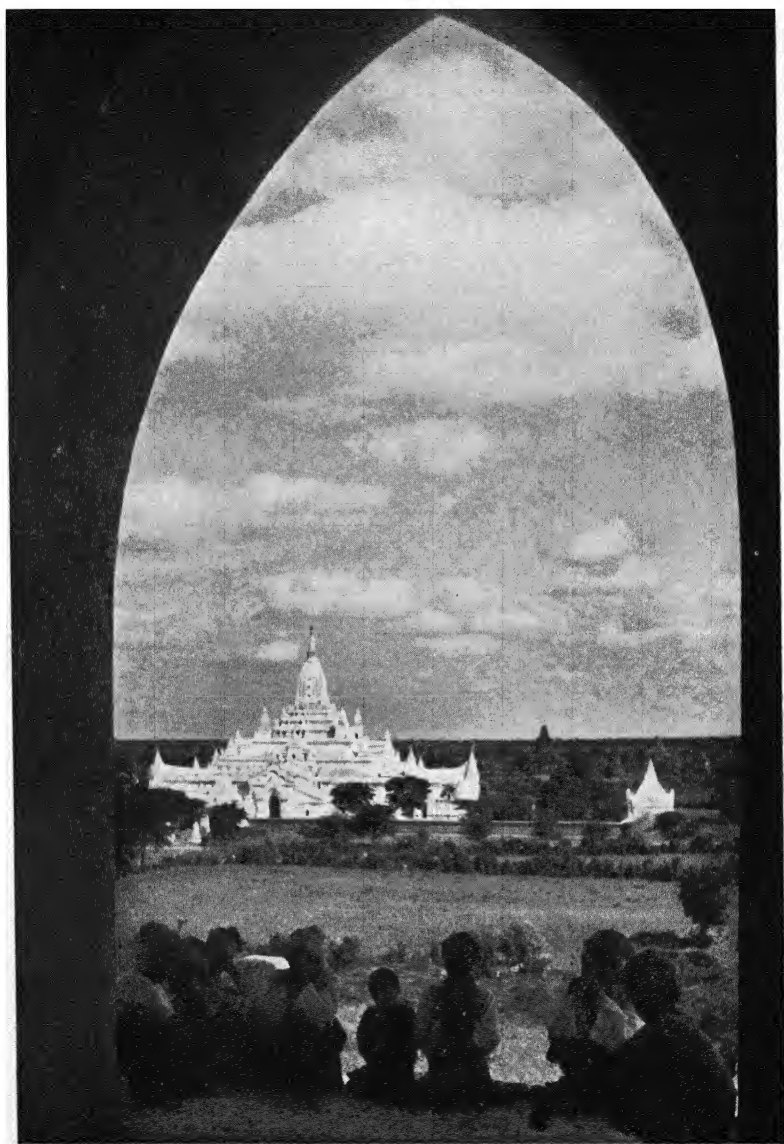
The doctors lost no time in making a thorough examination, and they quickly confirmed my own diagnosis that it was a reopening of the ulcer. But they decided, I am glad to say, that an operation was unnecessary. What I needed above all else was rest and quiet, and they refused to entertain any idea of my leaving to complete my journey to 'the United States for some little time.

It was difficult to curb my impatience, but I knew that their advice was sound. None the less, and though my stay could not have been made more pleasant, I decided to leave at the earliest possible moment. So, given every kind of care and gentleness by the admirable nurses of the hospital, and more often in the friendly company of some fellow doctor, I remained there for ten days. There is no praise too high for the care and attention I received.

But at the end of ten days I felt I had had enough of inactivity. The chief surgeon tried to insist that I should extend my stay for a month—and no doubt, in his position, I should have offered



CALCUTTA. The Victoria Memorial.



BURMA. Pilgrims praying at a pagoda, with Ananda Temple in the distance.

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precisely the same advice. I shook my head. Above all I was anxious to complete the first stage of my journey. I had reached the continent of America at last, but I was not yet in the United States, which was my destination. More than that, I had shipped as a surgeon and arrived as a patient. The thought galled me. I knew that my impatience and anxiety to reach Washington would only make a further stay in hospital unwise from all points of view.

Two days later I left by air for Washington. The curtain-raiser was over, and the stage was set for the first scene of the play proper. And, as the aeroplane climbed skywards, I could not help feeling that if the curtain-raiser was any indication of what was to follow, the next few months were going to be exciting indeed.

CHAPTER II

I Discover America

I did not fly direct to Washington, D.C., which, despite any attractions it might have of its own, was to me the possible gateway to the Pacific. I arranged, however, to call first at New York. It was not that I particularly wanted to see New York, even though that may seem a strange thing to many English people. They seem to think of Manhattan as being all America, though it is even less so than London is all England. My purpose was a more practical and personal one.

When my actress patient had left England on the airways reservation originally made for me, I had come to an agreement with her that when, at last, I should arrive in the United States, I should meet her in New York. It was not merely that I wished to renew a pleasant friendship. She was to pay me—in good American dollars—the fees for the services I had rendered her in London. So I hoped to overcome some of the currency difficulties that beset the traveller in these days. Older Englishmen tell me that when they were young they never thought of these things. Provided one had a pocketful of good English sovereigns one could go where one chose and never worry about money since the English golden pound was a pound anywhere. But that was in an entirely different world which seems today almost incredible—a world in which the traveller's path was not bestrewn by obstacles of every kind ranging from visas to currency declarations, passports to berth reservations. It is a world that I regret I never enjoyed. Yet perhaps it is as well that there are now some restrictions in force ; for it seems to me unlikely that under conditions where one did not need so much as a passport, I should probably ever have been at home.

As soon as I had reached central New York from the airport I hastened to the hotel where my friend had said she would be staying. The receptionist shook a determined head in answer

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to my inquiry. There was no one of that name in the hotel. But surely . . . I protested . . . surely. I could not believe it. Then, with the painstaking efficiency that later I was to come to recognise as the hallmark of the American hotel receptionist, he informed me, without so much as consulting the register, that my friend had arrived on such and such a date and left ten days later for Florida. . . .

I was thunderstruck. And then, as I turned away with a word of thanks, the truth dawned on me. Of course she had gone. I could not expect her to wait all the time I was indulging in adventurous and stormy voyages and indulging myself in illnesses in St. John's. I had been a fool even so much as to expect to find her there. But my annoyance was, even then, not so much at having missed her (and the invaluable dollars) but at having wasted yet more time on my journey to Washington. There and then I went to the airways offices and arranged to travel on to Washington as soon as possible. There was no time to lose.

Now if anyone translated the title of this chapter into the words *I Discover New York*, he is going to be sadly disappointed. I did not stay in New York. I can tell no stories of its hotels, its clubs, its swing bands, or its smart or seamy life. I know nothing of New York, except that knowledge which I have gained from the films—a knowledge shared by almost every other British citizen. Not only had I no desire to stay in New York; quite definitely, without those hoped-for dollars, I could not afford to. All capital cities are expensive places and, since America does everything on the grand scale, New York is the most expensive of all—and that also, of course, because it is the American capital of wealth and commerce, not the political capital. It is no place for a penurious British citizen, who, in these days, has to run the risk of having the turn-ups of his trousers searched to make sure he is not exporting with himself one ten-shilling note more than the maximum allowed by the rules of austerity.

Within a couple of hours of my arrival in New York I was again *en route*. And this time I really was going to Washington, my promised land. I did not expect milk and honey there, nor even to find manna on the way. But that does not mean that I expected anything like what I did, in fact, find.

There are all manner of things one can say about Washington,

D.C. It is the city of the White House and the Capitol—the White House that symbolises the height above heights to which any American can attain, and yet it is also the symbol of that friendship between the U.S.A. and Britain which must never be allowed to perish if there is ever to be lasting peace in the world. As the plane steadily drew nearer to the capital I thought of these things, wondering what the long line of American Presidents who have lived there, ranging in stature from international greatness through mediocrity to utter insignificance, so that not even Americans can recall their names, think in the shades of the present-day world and its perplexities. One always has these fanciful and grandiose reflections when approaching a strange place that is already familiar in history. Yet, when one arrives, the imponderables vanish and the practical world reasserts itself in a fashion often surprising. And so it was with Washington.

How do I think of Washington now? Do I invest it with the glamour of history—past and history both a-writing and to be written? Do I conjure up in my mind's eye its historical associations, its architecture, the places in which this or that vital aspect of American political life has its centre?

I do not.

I think of Washington, D.C., as the city that is blessed or cursed, according to your point of view, with fifty women to every individual male, so that on its busy boulevards it might be easier to find a white elephant than an eligible bachelor allowed to go his way in peace. For if such a one were to appear, through one of the mysterious dispensations of Providence that give variety to the world, a mob of stereotyped beauties, each the reflection of some idealised Hollywood star, would pursue him, mob him, and, in their insensate thirst for possession of so rare a prize, even perhaps tear him to pieces unless an Irish flatfoot intervened in time—as he probably would, for there are many such in Washington. So that one sometimes imagines that the city is populated by women and policemen.

I think, too, of Washington in the way that so many think of it after practical experience: as a place where accommodation of any kind, whether in house or hotel or even shed is (if it be conceivable) even scarcer than in England, and where the wealth

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of the Indies and the magical powers of a Merlin cannot command the space to live.

If I think also of Washington as the place of the bobbysoxers, that does not mean that the bobbysoxer is either indigenous to the capital or represented there in greater numbers than in other parts of the United States. It is simply that I had my first—and astonishing—introduction in that city to this remarkable species. The bobbysoxer in the flesh is even more alarming to the non-American when she is encountered than when she is seen through the eye of a cinecamera. From the authority of the teens, she will tell you, almost in the first breath, that Darwin and the biologists generally are all wrong—particularly when they talk of the domination of the male. They know—so they assure you, and I would be the last to even attempt to question it—that they know precisely what to expect from a man when he grows fresh, and that they know all the answers, as well as being able to anticipate the questions. And they will further declare that they are quite capable of looking after themselves, come what may. With this last declaration I am in complete agreement from practical experience. But then my introduction to the bobbysoxer was—to adapt the famous Dickensian phrase—intensive and peculiar.

To my mind, the bobbysoxer is probably the most serious problem that America has to face, a problem even more pressing than that of the atomic bomb or the threat of world economic depression. Looking at it with the biased eye of a medical man, it seems to me to involve deep and perturbing questions of national psychology—and abnormal psychology at that. But no doubt Americans, one of whose greatest virtues is the ability to analyse themselves and laugh at the results, are even more aware of that than I am, and it is neither here nor there for the purpose of this book. Washington, D.C., will no doubt solve the problem, as it solves all American problems, in its own American way. It has plenty of experience because Washington is a city of problems, and I had quite enough of my own personal ones to contend with without worrying unduly about the future of American youth.

If I had been one of those travellers who believe in organisation no doubt I should not have landed myself in one half the problems

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I found in Washington. Any self-respecting Englishman would have taken the prudent course and reserved a room in Washington well in advance, timing his arrival so as to coincide with the reservations. But though my passport proudly proclaims me a British citizen, that does not eradicate the Russian inconsequence that runs in my blood. Russians—or at any rate, Russians brought up as I was, for the modern Russian, with his statistical dialectical-material approach to everything is more strange to me, in many ways, than most non-Russians—have a blind spot that makes it normally impossible for them to see the prudent path. Which means of course that I did not make a reservation and arrived in the city with nothing more than faith in my luck.

In my innocence, I imagined that I had no need to do more than make a telephone call from the airport, give my name and say I was a British surgeon on official business—and the doors of any hotel I chose would fly open to me. A little experience proved to me that the proverbial camel has far more chance of passing through the eye of the needle than a man has of finding a vacant room in a Washington hotel.

It is said that since Columbus discovered America, anyone can discover anything in America ; and that he himself discovered not only America but also two Rumanian salesmen offering him shares in the Union Bank. That may be true. Certainly I discovered during a very short visit many unusual things in America. But what no man has ever been able to discover is a hotel room in Washington. That I am prepared solemnly to swear.

But this is running ahead a little. Before I ascertained this basic truth of American life, I made the acquaintance of the bobby-soxers, and the manner of it might well have been sufficient to daunt anyone from trying to thrust his way further into Washington life had his determination been less than mine.

For once I had been lucky in arranging my journey to Washington—or so I thought. I was told at the agency that I could have a seat on the next plane out, because a gentleman they called Red Bellows had cancelled his projected trip. They spoke the name with awe, and one almost imagined they would have liked to have bowed. In my innocence, I took it that Red Bellows was probably an American-Indian chief of high distinction. Only later I discovered that he was a baseball

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player of coast-to-coast fame. Again my luck was flattering only to deceive. Certainly I did not know that Mr. Red Bellows ranked with Mr. Bing Crosby, Mr. Frank Sinatra, and the much-married Mr. Manville, among the Joves of the bobbysoxers' pantheon.

The airline officials informed me that Mr. Red Bellows was not travelling by that aeroplane, but they did not, it appeared, tell anyone else. At the Washington airport there was the usual deputation to receive so outstanding an Olympian. Heading the deputation were the bobbysoxers. Behind, as a kind of tactical and strategical reserve, were the newspapermen and photographers.

Now there was none among my fellow passengers who could, by any stretch of the imagination, be confused with a national hero like Mr. Red Bellows. So far as my memory serves, there were a very mild-looking parson and his wife, a little Jewish business man, two young ladies, an older woman who might have been a governess or a teacher, and two or three specimens of humanity so nondescript that I can barely recall them. This may seem an odd assortment for the complement of an air liner, but in America air travel is commonplace and there is plenty of space ; it is not a thing reserved for V.I.P.s and those who, by cunning, can contrive to pass themselves off as these eminences.

The waiting bobbysoxers surveyed the alighting passengers avidly and expectantly. The parson, his wife, the Jew, the young ladies, the older lady, and the nondescripts, went their way, unmolested, unremarked—except for contemptuous dismissal. When I appeared there was a brief moment of bewilderment as though I ought not to have been there. And then the storm broke.

Now I make no claim to resemble in any way any baseball player in general or Mr. Red Bellows in particular. To me, baseball is a game even more esoteric than cricket is to anyone of non-English blood. But I am a man. And on that occasion I was the only man who might conceivably be the yearned for Mr. Bellows. I might not resemble in the least his much published photographs. I might obviously be somewhat above the average age of star baseball players. But the logic of fans is inexorable. Mr. Bellows was due on that plane. None of the other passengers could possibly be Mr. Bellows. Therefore, this

strange man must be he. That he might conceivably have changed his plans (possibly to outwit the bobbysoxers) never entered the deputation's heads.

There were about twenty of them. After that momentary hesitation, as of doubt, or perhaps as of the python poisoning itself to strike, they hurled themselves at me in a solid body. I had a curious sinking feeling in my stomach, and I am sure I developed symptoms of syncope. The attack was so sudden, so utterly unexpected, so completely unbelievable, that I was unable even to seek safety in flight. All I was aware of was that I was being submerged beneath a tidal wave of juvenile femininity, sweeping over me with wild cries.

Some, it seemed, wanted autographs. Others wanted souvenirs—and these they were prepared to take by *force majeure*. Grasping hands clutched at my buttons; they ripped my sleeve; they snatched at my tie.

For the moment, my Russian temper almost got the better of me, and I thought of fighting back. But I had a strange fear of American law. I might be arraigned for assaulting a minor, and, rightly or wrongly, I had the impression that in the United States that is a highly criminal offence. So I contented myself with protesting as strongly as I might with my remaining breath and steadying myself to meet the onrush.

Queer thoughts chased through my mind. Willy-nilly, anyone who lives in England derives much of his beliefs about American life from the moving pictures, even though his reason tells him that over-statement and even distortion are not entirely unknown in Hollywood. Was this, I wondered, a hold-up in broad daylight? Was America being swept by an epidemic of juvenile crime, in which young girls were the chief participants? And had things come to such a pass that at six o'clock in the evening, on the airport of the Federal capital, with policemen thick about the place, that these depredations could go unchecked?

It was beyond me. I was told afterwards that the whole affair was over and done with in less than five minutes, but they were the longest and most uncomfortable five minutes through which I have ever lived. In some ways, the rescue was even more gruelling than the attack, for I was crushed between the opposing forces—bobbysoxers on the one hand and police and officials on

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the other—and since one bobbysoxer refused to let go the stranglehold she had on my tie, I can imagine what the rope in a tug-of-war would experience if it were a sentient being.

At last I was free, and explanations began. It was only when the officials had heard the girls chanting the name of Red Bellows that they realised what had happened. Before then they had been as thunderstruck as I had been.

Now all was changed. Instead of twenty pairs of grasping, tearing, fighting hands, I found twenty hands held out for me to shake. And the war-cries had now become transmuted into the softer tones of apologies. The transformation was complete. One of the bobbysoxers offered to buy me a new hat (though I had not been wearing one; perhaps she thought it had been pulverised in the *mêlée*). Another promised me a new tie—which was much needed. A third wanted to take me straight away in a taxi to the nearest valet parlour, of which there were so many in every American town, and have my suit pressed for me, though I feared it was long past any such ministrations. One, who impressed herself on my memory because of her charming freckles, offered to take me home with her, introduce me to her parents, and get me refurbished.

Politeness dictated that I should refuse all these generous offers—but subsequently I regretted bitterly that I had turned down the last one; it might have short-circuited my problems, and in any event the girl was quite charming. But I had no time to think then, and I have never been gifted with the second sight that sees the difficulties of the future. Moreover, my attention was distracted by the fact that I was now being openly discussed as though I were an exhibit in some Madame Tussaud's.

"He's real cute," remarked a voice behind me.

"Sure!" came the drawled reply. "He didn't even squeal when I tried to rip his pants off. Gee! Guess he must be English—he wears suspenders." The last words were spoken as a great discovery. I did not realise at the moment that "suspenders" is American for "braces."

Staring at me was a dark, tough-looking girl of about sixteen, chewing reflectively.

"Say, brother," she said slowly, "whad' you do for bread?"

"Nothing," I replied, trying to be bright. "Just looking for a room in a good hotel."

"You sure gotta job there," she commented. "Just wash it up, brother. 'Tain't no use nohow."

I didn't know then that it is the craze of some bobbysoxers to copy the very words of one of their idols of screen or radio, and I wondered why she spoke in that Negro drawl.

I felt rather lost and lonely when the bobbysoxers withdrew in good order. If their reception had been alarming, it had at any rate been warm. Now, here I was in Washington at last, without a friend and with the task of finding a room looming ominously ahead. For, despite everything, I felt that the bobbysoxer's warning had been a real one.

The receptionist at the airport told me I could use the telephone as much as I liked, and provided me with a list of hotels. But underneath the professional courtesy was the thinly veiled suggestion that she was only providing these services to humour a madman in his folly. After I had exhausted the list, and then tried my luck at ringing up numbers taken at random from the directory to see if some private individual might help me, I gave it up. Perhaps, I thought, personal visits were better.

For three solid hours I tramped the streets. Always it was the same. There was plenty of courtesy for the visitor to Washington—but there was not a room of any kind. I have never been refused with such unfailing politeness and in so many different ways before. Looking back on it, the whole thing is a tribute to American hospitality; the hotel clerks can even say "No" a hundred or more times a day and make it sound as though it was the first time in their lives they had had regretfully to deny a would-be guest. No, there was no doubt about this shortage. It was complete. There wasn't even an under-the-counter trade.

The fantastic idea of offering myself (after Hollywood fashion) as a butler crossed my mind, but I dismissed it as absurd. It had been very amusing, in the comfort of a West End cinema, to see Fred MacMurray and Veronica Lake (or was it Claudette Colbert?) pretending to be a butler and his cook-wife—and being swamped with glittering proposals from the best Washington families. Such things would not happen to a mere Anglo-Russian surgeon

stranded in the capital. No doubt even in real life it would be easy enough for Veronica Lake. I myself would not hesitate for a split second to offer her the post of a cook if she came to London and found herself without a roof over her head. I would even go down on my knees and beseech her to accept the position *honoris causa* and without obligation to service. And, even if I had been so misguided—as I might easily have been, for I had been reduced to desperation—as to try my scheme, I should, I afterwards learnt, have met with no success. For such jobs can only be obtained by a member of the appropriate union, and any family going into the black market for servants would soon find themselves without any servants at all—while the unfortunate employee might find life as a “scab” something more than unpleasant.

By ten o'clock I was beyond caring what happened to me. The sidewalks were crowded. The lights were bright. There were dozens of attractive restaurants that, in any other circumstances, would not have beckoned to me in vain, but not even the thought of American food after all the years of rationing and austerity raised any spark in me. I was obsessed by the idea that if only I went on walking I should, like the immortal Felix the Cat, find an end to my troubles.

I very nearly did, though not in the way I dreamt. My mind fixed on the one idea, I stepped out into the road without looking, and it is even more dangerous in Washington to do so than it is in London. A taxi skidded to a stop. The driver's language was strange, but its import was familiar. The Cockney taxi-drivers of London say the same things in different words on similar occasions.

“Are you headin' for the hospital?” he ended sarcastically. “If so, hop right in.”

“Sorry,” I said contritely. “But I don't mind going to the hospital if they've a vacant bed there.”

He made one of those curious inarticulate sounds to which only Americans can impart deep significance and drove on. But his chance derisory words had started a new train of thought in my mind. Hospitals had beds, and I wanted a bed above all else. So what about it? Presumably one had to be a patient to get into a hospital bed. The answer to that was obvious: I must become

a patient. And, after all, I told myself, with the seeming logic that always convinces one in these internal arguments, I *was* really a patient. At that very moment, if I had followed highly competent medical advice, I should have been still receiving the attentions of the staff at the hospital in St. John's. Moreover—and this was the final, conclusive point—I had documentary evidence to prove it. In my pocket was my discharge from St. John's. Quite unmistakably it asserted that I had been suffering from a gastric hæmorrhage and that I must exercise the greatest care during the next few weeks if I was to avoid a relapse. What was more likely than that after the strain of the attack by the bobbysoxers and hours tramping the streets—to say nothing of a narrowly averted accident—the old trouble should have returned?

A gleam of hope rose in me. It broadened into a ray. I hailed a passing taxi.

"The hospital," I gasped.

"Which one, buddy?" jerked the driver. "You're a stranger, I guess. There are twenty-five in this burg."

"The nearest," I replied. "And make it snappy, or your taxi'll become a hearse."

Apparently this moved him, for he whipped open the door and almost before I was in the cab he had shot away into the night.

It might be easy to fool a taximan, I thought, but, after all, there were doctors in the hospital. And I have always had a special regard for the acumen of American doctors. But I wasn't a surgeon for nothing. Years of experience had engraved on my mind every detail of the pain-distorted face. In another time and place, I should have had a profound distaste for what I was doing, but necessity knows no law. It was this—or a night on the streets. And so, in the brief ride to the municipal hospital, I assumed the best mask I could, trying by the aid of the little mirror in the cab to make it as realistic as possible—though without attracting the attention of the driver, who kept glancing back to see if his "casualty" was all right. I admit to a qualm of conscience when the man refused the fare, saying he was glad he'd been around. . . .

To pass oneself off as a person in pain upon an unsuspecting

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taxi-man is one thing ; to deceive a doctor—especially in a hospital—is quite another, for doctors, by training and experience alike, tend to become sceptical and even, as some critics assert, cynical. My main test was still to come, and I passed through the doors with a feeling of great anxiety. Yet here again I was encouraged, though of course unwittingly, in the path of deception I had chosen to pursue. The porter did not even ask my business. He just cast one quick appraising glance at me and, without as much as asking me my business, directed me tersely to the Out-Patients' department. Indeed, he was so impressed by my mask of suffering that he called after me to inquire if I needed any help—to which I returned a rather shaky "no." Let me here admit that the quaver in my voice was due not to the illness of which I was supposed to be a victim as from nerves. The big ordeal was at hand.

As I made my way towards the Out-Patients' department I grew so interested that I almost forgot the part I was playing. Never before had I seen a hospital so magnificent, so beautiful, and—yes—so luxurious, if English invalids can imagine that word applied to a hospital. When I had seen Hollywood presentation of hospitals on the screen, I had always felt inclined to scoff and held more than a passing doubt in reserve on the genuineness of the portrayal—as hundreds of others in England must do and have done. But here was the thing in actuality. The corridors and rooms might have been built for a set in one of the Dr. Kildare films. I was thunderstruck. Since that fateful day I have seen other American hospitals, and I have come to realise that this standard is the rule rather than the exception. So it seems that in dealing with American hospitals Hollywood, for once, does not have to glamorise or exaggerate in propagandist terms. The places are really like that.

And I was soon to discover, to my amazement, that another detail of American hospital life as exhibited on the screen is no more than a direct translation from life. I passed into the Out-Patients' department and was greeted by the nurse on duty. Now, she was quite the prettiest and most charming nurse I had ever seen up to that moment, though I have met many nurses and not a few of them have been endowed with the gifts of good looks and attractive personalities ; and later I was to find that this

vision, as she seemed to me, was no exception. Her sisters were to be found in numbers throughout the United States nursing services. It is no wonder, when one comes to think of it, that the American public (especially the male part of it) is so much more hospital-conscious than the British. In such hospitals and with such nurses about them, it is almost a wonder that any man ever bothers to get well again—which, I suppose, explains why American doctors are so extremely efficient and so much on the *qui vive* to detect malingering. There are drawbacks in all things.

My luck was right in—and, ironically, when, by all the rules of justice, I least deserved it. The nurse was so visibly impressed by my look of utter agony that she wasted no words on me. Immediately she put into action the automatic telephone device, which caused loud-speakers throughout the hospital to intone the name of the doctor on duty. It is to my complete shame that I confess I have quite forgotten his name, so for the purpose of this record he must be Dr. Smith. He was with me in a very brief time—and again I thought that I must be living through some fantasy from which I would soon reawake, perhaps to find myself once more tossing uneasily on a hard bunk and in the grip of *mal-de-mer*. For again it was the films come true.

He eyed me keenly, and in order to distract his attention from my face I presented my discharge papers from the St. John's hospital. The strain of keeping up that expression was beginning to tell, and I felt that at any moment my normal self would betray me overtly. I make no claim nor do I ever wish to be a second Lon Chaney, senior.

His eyebrows shot up as he ran his eye over the papers, but it was not, as I had at first supposed, at the details of my complaint. It was my medical qualifications that had aroused his interest, and he turned to me with brisk questions that he would never have thought of putting to an ordinary patient. Professional brother was talking to professional brother—and it seemed that because of that nothing was to be left undone. It would never do to allow an English surgeon to go away with the idea that American hospitals did not know their business down to the latest and most refined detail of diagnostic and clinical technique.

As he gave abrupt orders to the nurse, my heart sank. I had

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nothing but the highest admiration for his efficiency ; but taking everything into account he was going much, much, too far. X-rays I might have endured—though they would have revealed at once that I was hardly to be distinguished from a common fraud. But a blood transfusion was carrying matters beyond all reason. It was not only my conscience that rebelled. There is, I suppose, nothing so unpalatable to a doctor as one of the medicines he prescribes so confidently to others.

“ Can I speak to you a moment in private, doctor ? ” I asked, with a glance at the nurse. If I had to make a confession, I would rather do so without the disturbing influence of those bright eyes which would, I felt, probably twinkle outrageously with derision.

“ Certainly,” he replied. And, taking my arm to give me an entirely unnecessary support, he led me into a small anteroom.

“ Doctor,” I said, and rarely have I felt as abject as I did then, “ I’ve a confession to make.”

“ Go right ahead,” he said, giving me a sharp glance.

“ I’m not ill,” I blurted out, for all the world like a schoolboy confessing to some trivial sin, and with the same exaggerated air of guilt. “ I’m wasting your time when I’ve no doubt you’ve something really important to do. I don’t want X-rays and I certainly don’t want a blood transfusion. There’s no hæmorrhage—there’s nothing at all the matter with my inside unless it is that I need a good meal.”

He gazed at me in astonishment. “ I don’t get it,” he said.

I told him. “ It’s this city of yours,” I explained. “ On the spur of the moment I decided to try to put this one over just so that I could find a bed for the night. And now I can’t do it. The only thing you can do for me is to have me thrown out into the street as an awful warning.”

For a moment he stared at me and then he burst into a paroxysm of laughter. I thought he would never stop. Then, still chuckling, he called out to the nurse to cancel all the instructions he had given, and then—to my horror—he led me back to the other room and told her all about it. I felt my face flushing like a peony.

“ It’s good,” he chuckled. “ You nearly pulled a fast one on us there, Dr. Borodin, for I admit you put it over on me completely. Now I come to think of it, maybe you looked a bit too

much like a walking cadaver. But come right along to the recreation room. The boys'll be glad to know you. You'd better keep your mouth shut outside, though, or we'll have every visitor to this city throwing fits on the pavement, and we'll have to set up a screening department before we let people through."

Linking his arm in mine, he conducted me to a pleasant, comfortably furnished room where there were about half-a-dozen young men, all of whom jumped politely to their feet when he led me in and introduced me. He lost no time in telling them the story, and there was a general wave of uproarious laughter. If I had done nothing to be particularly proud of, at least I had given Dr. Smith a story that he would be able to repeat for some time to come—and I was pretty certain, from his recital to his colleagues, that the tale would lose nothing in the telling. Like so many Americans, he was a natural raconteur.

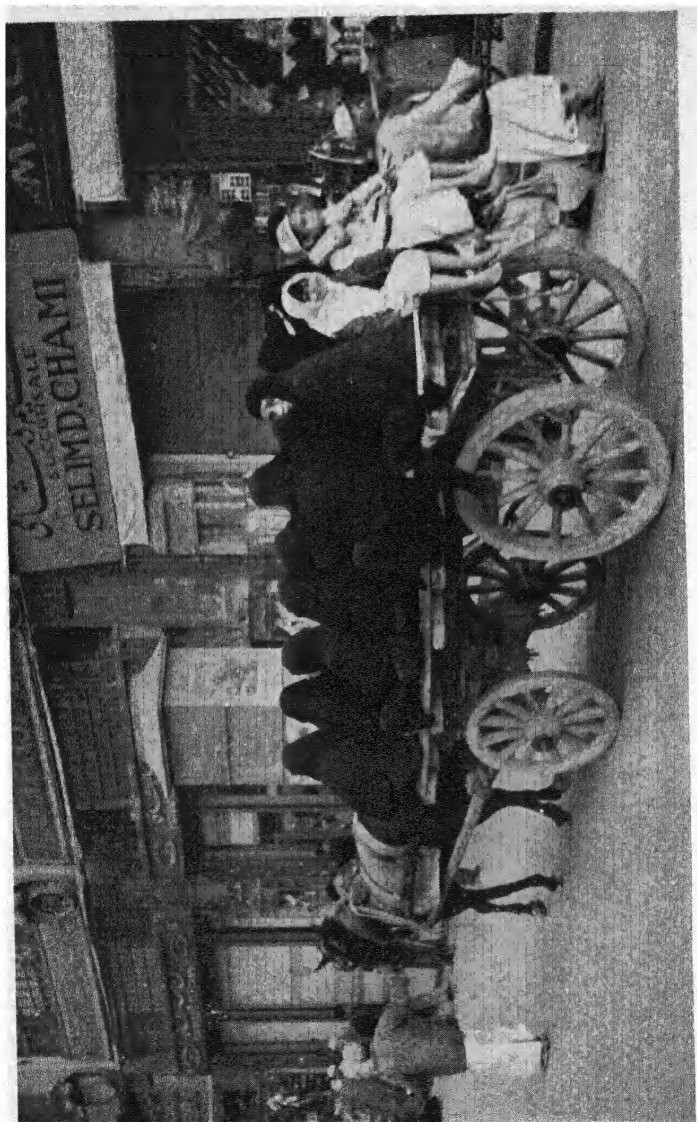
It never takes long for a doctor to get on good terms with his fellows, and, while they fed me on doughnuts—the real American variety, not the pitiful masqueraders that are sold in England—and coffee, we began to exchange experiences. Some of the young men had served in the European Theatre of Operations and wanted news of England—and I was gratified to notice that their inquiries arose from genuine interest and not simply from politeness.

While the conversation was at its height I noticed out of the tail of my eye that one of the doctors left the room with a surreptitious air. Idly I wondered what was afoot. Certainly I did not expect him to return in a few minutes with a copy of *Red Surgeon*, which, a little bashfully, he asked me to autograph. He flattered me by saying that it was one of his favourite books—and, if its well-thumbed condition was any evidence, it was. Now I felt properly at home. Not only was my vanity tickled, but I felt that I was something more than just a chance comer to this hospitable assembly.

Often on occasions like this I wish that those who constantly decry the medical profession could be present. These people never tire of asserting that the only bond of union between doctors is a desire to cut each other's throats, and that the only occasion on which they speak with unanimity is when they combine to fleece a rich patient. Even if those slanders are not



Bali girls pounding grain.



Cairo street scene.

generally accepted in their most exaggerated form, the fact remains that many—perhaps most—people imagine the state of the medical profession to be one of internecine war and petty, personal jealousy. Superficially there may be one or two things that give faint colour to these beliefs, yet underneath there is a real bond of comradeship, which knows nothing of national or racial boundaries ; and it is on social occasions such as these—occasions warm, informal and friendly—when this is most clearly seen.

Such friendliness is not, of course, unfamiliar to me ; I have known it often and in many countries. But now I was tasting something else, no less sweet ; my first introduction to American hospitality. There was nothing these men would not have done for me, and their consideration, in small matters as well as large, was a delight. As for talk, I am sure that that would have continued till daybreak had not my utter exhaustion at last obtruded itself so that I could no longer conceal it. Immediately the fact was noticed, my first acquaintance, Dr. Smith, jumped to his feet, remarking with a grin that it was time the patient went to bed.

“He’s had a fast recovery from abdominal hæmorrhage,” he said slyly, “and I guess we mustn’t run the risk of a relapse.”

It was three o’clock in the morning. And there was a bed to go to after all. I was shown to a small, but quite luxurious, room, vacant because one of the doctors was on leave. There I spent an extremely comfortable night, and I believe I should have slept into the afternoon if I had not been awakened about ten o’clock by a very attractive wardmaid, who brought me a delicious breakfast. Apologising for disturbing me, she informed me that Dr. Hayley, the chief surgeon of the hospital, wanted me to know that he would be glad to see me whenever it might be convenient—but I was not to hurry on that account.

This saving clause I took at its face value, and it was not until half past twelve that I found my way to Dr. Hayley’s room. He was one of those men who, if one had seen him in an American film, one would have immediately picked out as the family doctor. His mouth was firm, and his determined grey eyes looked out through a pair of those rimless spectacles with high

hinges which are so popular among Americans, particularly in the professions.

It was difficult for me to get to grips with Dr. Hayley. His manner was precise, his speech punctilious ; but all the time there was a suggestion that, underneath it all, he was continually weighing one up and analysing. He professed to have read my book on thoracic surgery—and, more than that, to have enjoyed it; and he formally invited me to give a lecture and demonstration to the students and interneers.

“ I’d be honoured to do so,” I replied, “ if there’s a suitable case for me.”

There were several patients, it turned out, who wanted thoracic operations, and the question of which one I should take was put to the vote of the students and internes themselves. They decided unanimously that I should operate on a patient who required surgical treatment of the breasts. They had read that I had devised a new technique for this particular operation, and they were anxious to see it. It could not have fallen out better for me.

Yet, for all that, I felt rather nervous when I was preparing for the operation. The effects of my illness had not entirely left me, and I was in entirely strange surroundings. Of course, I am used to operating in many different hospitals and nursing homes, but this was a different thing altogether, for I quickly found that in many small matters the routine of American hospitals differs from that in England or even on the Continent. But a glance at the modern, beautifully equipped theatre immediately reassured me ; and when I saw the eager faces of my “ audience ” behind the glass partition I knew I would be unable to disappoint them. Dr. Smith was to assist me ; and this further reassured me, for I already regarded him as a friend. The only disturbing factor was the presence of Dr. Hayley himself, who stood by, his keen, cold grey eyes missing nothing, so that I felt that the most minute detail was being observed and judgment being passed on it.

There is no better cure for a sick doctor than a call to work. For a surgeon, the best of all tonics is an operation to which he feels that he must give everything he has in skill and knowledge. The moment I began to operate all my doubts and anxieties

vanished. I forgot all about my surroundings, and so far as I was concerned the place might have been one of those in London where I habitually operate.

It was only when it was over that I came back to my environment. The earlier anxieties swept over me. How had it gone in their eyes? Had it impressed Dr. Hayley? A hundred questions passed through my mind.

Not all these doubts were resolved as easily as my earlier fears. There could be no denying the warmth and generosity of the applause that reached me from the students and internes, while the comments of Dr. Smith were so flattering as to be adulatory. I glanced at Dr. Hayley.

"Thank you, Dr. Borodin," he said precisely. "A very interesting experience. We are all very grateful to you."

It would have been stupid, I suppose, to expect a man of his character to be more definite. He would not be given to praise, either faint or glowing. At the same time, I do not believe for a moment that he would have tolerated the slightest mistake in silence—not even when the courtesy due to a visitor was an overriding consideration. So, quite unjustifiably, I flatter myself that he not only liked my operation but also was a little impressed. Those keen eyes suggested it a little.

A little later, when I was washed and a normal member of society again, I was borne off to the recreation room and provided with another American meal, while my colleagues eagerly went over with me the details of the operation. But now I felt that I stood in danger of outwearing my welcome, though there was nothing in my companions' manner to hint at it. Accordingly, I rose and said I must go. In any event, it appeared that there would be no bed for me that night, unless I returned to my original status as a would-be patient (with its attendant risks at the hands of Dr. Smith, his X-rays and his blood transfusions), for the doctor whose room I had had was already back, and had, in fact, witnessed my operation. But the fund of American hospitality had not been exhausted. One of the doctors gave me a letter of introduction to some relatives of his who lived just outside Washington and declared they would be delighted to provide me with accommodation. It was a warm gesture which aroused all my sincere gratitude.

ONE HORIZON

There was an orgy of handshaking when I left and a volley of invitations to come again—invitations that I shall unhesitatingly accept whenever the opportunity offers. The streets outside seemed very cold and lonely after the friendship I had experienced, and they were full of unhappy memories for me. Yet now their unfriendliness was tempered by the knowledge that I was not entirely alone, and by the discovery that behind the brisk decision of the businesslike American in his office there beat some of the warmest and most hospitable hearts in the world.

CHAPTER III

Pacific Gateway

Washington may have first seemed to me a City of Problems, but it was also my City of Good Luck. Never before, I think, have so many fortunate chances befallen me, and I can never expect again to experience such consistent favouring by the gods. And also, I must confess, my difficulties in those first appalling hours were largely of my own making, due primarily to my own forgetfulness.

I had walked the streets. I had forced my way into a hospital and so by dubious means to a bed and wonderful hospitality. I had seemed the most unfortunate of men—at any rate in my own estimation. Yet, if I had stopped to think for a moment, I might have avoided all those anxieties. In reality, I am glad of my forgetfulness on this occasion, for it introduced me to the medical staff of the Municipal Hospital and forged links of friendship that, I think and hope, will be lasting.

Not only had I a friend—an American friend—residing within easy reach of Washington, but also he had courteously allowed me to quote his address as that to which the American Government department might reply to my letter asking for facilities to visit the Pacific Islands. No doubt if I had gone direct to him I should have found myself provided with a bed and unlimited hospitality of the kind that already I had come to realise is inborn in the American people.

It was as I stood outside the hospital wondering in effect what the answer was to the question, "Where do I go to from here?", that all this returned to me. A call on him at least—if only to see whether my letter had drawn an answer—was imperative; and without more ado I hailed a taxi. The journey was rather longer than I had expected, and my slender store of cash was only just sufficient to meet the fare and leave me a little small change.

Mr. Hartman greeted me with figuratively open arms.

"The airline people told me you'd arrived—I'd asked them to let me know," he said. "And I was just trying to figure out what had happened to you. I left a message at the office asking you to ring me up. Did you get it?"

"No," I replied. "Too many things were happening at the airport, and I was in too much of a hurry to leave."

He raised his eyebrows interrogatively, and so, to satisfy his curiosity—and also to indulge myself in the pleasure of telling a good story—I gave him an account of all that had happened to me. He laughed heartily.

"Well," he said, "I knew strange things happened in Washington, but I don't think I've ever heard anything quite up to that. You seem to have fallen on your feet O.K. You always do, Borodin."

"They've had a lot of practice," I replied. "I've been falling on them for a good many years."

He chuckled and proceeded to lead me to a bedroom which, he said, was to be my headquarters for as long as I chose to remain in Washington.

"But really, it's too good of you—" I protested.

"No," he said. "We can't have you going away with wrong impressions of the way Washington treats distinguished British surgeons. And in any case, it won't be for long. I have a letter for you."

He excused himself, to return a few minutes later bearing one of those long envelopes which all American official departments and business houses seem to use for their entire correspondence, no matter how trivial. Eagerly I tore it open, and a broad smile spread over my face.

"I guess I was right," said my host; and I handed him the letter.

It was brief, but to the point, with none of those formal circumlocutions that mark official British correspondence, which usually begins with a denial, by implication, of the writer's responsibility for what he has to say. "I am directed . . ." says the British Civil Servant; but rarely says by whom. This American letter did, it was true, begin with the same words, but somehow they had a different ring, as though they had been written in response to a specific command.

PACIFIC GATEWAY

Dear Dr. Borodin—ran the letter—I am directed by General H——, Chief Medical Administrator, to inform you that you have been granted permission and all facilities to fly to any part of the Pacific under United States control. Please call at this office whenever convenient to pick up the necessary papers . . .

"I shan't waste any time over doing that," I commented. "It sounds terribly ungrateful after your generous offer, but I've been so long getting as far as this that I feel I mustn't lose a further minute unnecessarily."

"That's O.K.," said Mr. Hartman. "You'd better get a move on. That letter's been hanging around here for a week."

I was on the point of rushing out there and then to make the journey back to Washington when I remembered my dollar difficulties. Rather hesitantly, I raised the question with my host.

"That's the way of it," he remarked. "You can have all the money in this crazy world and just can't use it outside of your own little corner. O.K., I'll fix it."

He made me a loan that was ridiculously large for my purpose, though I admit I was very glad to have it. And then, to gild the lily, he offered to drive me to the offices of the War Transport Administration in his car.

"No," he said, "this isn't generosity. It's just plain business. I have shares in the automobile industry, and I just want you to know how good our cars are today . . ."

He knew I liked large, fast cars, though I still prefer to remain entirely ignorant of the mysterious processes that go on beneath their bonnets. From all points of view I was more than glad to accept his offer.

Certainly he could have found no better way of impressing me with the merits of American cars than running me into town in his own. It was a distinctly imposing vehicle, streamlined to the last nut and bolt; and it had room in it for seven people at least, in comfort. There used to be a gibe, I believe, many years ago, that Americans did not sit in their cars but on them. If that was ever true, it is not so today. So far from sitting on them, one just disappears into them; and when one is there one lies, so to speak, on the lap of luxury. One presses a button and the doors open—and they don't slam when you close them.

And, of course, there's radio—there is radio everywhere in America, and most of it is designed to go with anything, from car-rides to being ill in bed ; one can't escape it. The price he named as having paid for the car struck me as just absurd. For a similar sum in England one would get a small car with just enough room to squeeze into on terms of intimacy with one's knees.

We made the run in what I think must have been record time, for he was determined to impress me in every possible way. But perhaps what impressed me even more than the car itself was the vast number of similar cars we encountered on the way. I don't mean cars of this one particular make, but cars built to the same general idea—streamlined, sleek and—if I may be allowed a word of criticism—perhaps just a little too spectacular. Everyone in America has a car, just as he has a refrigerator. Austerity in England seemed further away than ever.

I was anxious to see how I would be received at the Administration of War Transport. In my impetuosity I had not so much as thought of making an appointment, and I had uneasy memories of the sort of thing that happens to those ill-advised enough to make an unheralded call at a British government office. One states one's business, usually on a form—and one waits in discomfort. After some little time a messenger arrives and transports the visitor to another waiting-room in a more remote part of the building—and one waits again, in perhaps greater discomfort. So it goes on. In these days most of us have become familiar with it. But there was none of that in these Washington offices. I was greeted like an expected guest. My wait was of the shortest duration—and amid comfortable surroundings. Finally, and in a very brief time, I found myself closeted with a senior official, whose main anxiety seemed to be to make sure that he had not overlooked some way of helping me.

The whole thing was a miracle of efficiency. I might have been a favoured customer in a first-class travel agency, for I found that all the requisite papers and permits had been prepared for me, provisional bookings arranged, and even a suggested itinerary drawn up. The business, which I had expected to be complicated and long drawn out, was settled in under an hour.

"I don't know how to thank you," I said.

"That's O.K.," replied the official with a smile. "We like to impress our visitors." It was the same story all round, I thought. "But," he went on, "there's just one thing the Chief Medical Administrator would like to have you do before you leave Washington."

"If there's anything I can do," I answered, "I'd be more than glad."

He told me what it was. The military doctors in Washington wanted to meet me so that I could talk to them about my experiences of war-surgery in England—and particularly the work I had done in plastic operations. It was an invitation I could not have refused if I would—and I certainly had no desire to evade it. Putting it at its lowest, I should in all probability benefit not a little from what they had to tell me.

The details of this meeting had already been provisionally arranged, and I had no hesitation in falling in with the suggested time and date. I was to give a short informal address, and then there would be a general discussion. It seemed a good idea.

Before going to bed that night I spent a little time making some notes for the address, which was to take place the next day; but when the time came I found that it was better to talk entirely extempore. These doctors, all of them of wide experience, wanted to learn particularly about the work I had done in performing plastic operations on members of the various European Resistance movements during the war—work about which I had already published some details in the American magazines. They listened with great attention, but what I was looking forward to was the discussion when I could hear something of their work, which had been carried out in many different fields. Several of them had been through the toughest parts of the Pacific campaign, when medical work of any kind had to be carried on under the greatest possible difficulties—conditions that, in fact, seemed impossible. But somehow they had done it, though from their modest statements one would hardly have suspected that there had been anything unusual about it.

One thing that struck me about this gathering, and that has, as a matter of fact, impressed me in connection with the American

medical profession generally, is that everyone is anxious to learn. There is no false pride. No matter how eminent an authority an individual doctor may be, he is always ready to admit that someone else, probably quite undistinguished, has had some experience that he himself has not had. Not one of them seems to think that "he knows it all." There is a spirit of searching, eager inquiry and a readiness to pursue new paths that, though it may occasionally lead to mistakes through over-enthusiasm, is undoubtedly a very considerable power for progress in modern medicine. Medicine is first a science and then an art—yes ; but, above all, in America it is an adventure. This is the outlook which provides such a powerful corrective to the sometimes over-cautious conservative tradition of Europe.

Facilities for research are also on a lavish scale in the States, and this, too, keeps alive the progressive spirit, for it provides opportunities for the young men with ideas to pursue their own lines of inquiry under almost ideal conditions. In medicine, as in almost everything else technical and non-technical, Americans have a passion for research and statistics. At times, of course, it goes a little too far, as when some American psychologists try to reduce human behaviour to patterns based on a statistical foundation. Yet there can be no doubt that it is better to have too much research than too little—if it is, indeed, possible to have too much research in any field.

These thoughts have taken me a little off the track of my chronicle of events to which it is now necessary to return, else the reader may feel that I am as anxious to delay his arrival, with me, in the Pacific isles as authority and fate combined seemed determined to hinder me. My last impressions of Washington, D.C., the capital of the United States and, as some believe, the capital at some future date of a federation of the world, was of another warm leave-taking. Once again—this time by the Army doctors—I was pressed to return whenever I was able and to bring them fresh news of medicine in Europe ; for though all American doctors are ardent devourers of medical literature and periodicals and have access to admirable digests of advances in all parts of the world, they seem always to prefer the personal contact and the informal talk "off the record," as their phrase runs.

One more digression and I can again plant my feet firmly on the path to the Pacific. It is this : Time and again in America I was urged to come back. There is nothing extraordinary in this, perhaps, for it is a natural gesture of courtesy from host to departing guest. For all that I was never conscious that any one of these invitations was a mere formality. All had the ring of sincerity, and I was made to feel—as I was glad to feel—that the persons concerned really would be happy to see me again, as much for my own sake as for any professional reasons.

Within twenty-four hours of cordially saying good-bye to the military doctors, I was *en route* for San Francisco, the gateway to the Pacific.

Emplaning in America is attended with as little fuss as taking a train from a London railway terminus. The only difference is that one is made to feel one's comfort and convenience are the principal aims of the airline company at the moment. Airport officials, stewardesses, air-crews—everyone has a welcoming smile and treats the passenger as a human being.

For once, I had a journey that was devoid of adventure. The very fact that nothing unusual happened—that we left the airport dead on time and arrived at San Francisco exactly to schedule after an uneventful trip—is so abnormal in my experience that I find it worth recording. And after the strenuous time I had had since leaving London this very humdrumness was a welcome change. I was able to believe that, if only for a single occasion, my affairs were moving forward according to plan, and that the capricious fate that ruled my life was, if not sound asleep, at any rate nodding and relaxing.

San Francisco is really the gateway to the Pacific. This is not merely a picturesque way of stating an obvious geographical fact ; it is apparent from the moment one sets foot in the city and mingles with the crowds in the streets. One expects a great seaport to be international ; and 'Frisco is certainly that. But it has a different quality from the internationality of, say, the port areas of London or Liverpool. Here one stands on the fringes of the Pacific world. Chinese, Japanese, Polynesians—they are there in numbers, as though by right. The fact is perhaps more striking because the transition is so sudden. If one travels east from England one becomes gradually inured

to the more exotic races of the earth. Oriental colour is admixed with the stream of life drop by drop so that one is barely conscious of it. But arriving by air in San Francisco from Washington brings one abruptly to a line of change. It is a town in which the peoples of two hemispheres intermingle, as though this was the sector in which their two circles intersected.

And it was in San Francisco, about which so much has been written that there is little left for me to add, that my adventurous life caught up with me. The unexpected happened—and in surroundings that made little suggestion of being a background to the surprising.

It was a lovely February day. The sun was shining and it was warm. I turned into a café in the fashionable part of the town and ordered an ice-cream soda. Still with memories of English austerity fresh in mind, I lingered over its nectared luxuriousness, and automatically my thoughts turned to the cold, damp cheerless days of an English February, when even the struggling snowdrops seem more of a mockery than a promise of spring to come.

Idly my eyes wandered about the light, brightly decorated café. For a moment they lingered on a nearby table, where an extremely smart and attractive young woman was also enjoying an ice-cream soda—not, it is true, with the same leisured indulgence as I, but more with the air of one going through a normal routine that was, nevertheless, extremely pleasant.

She seemed familiar to me. I knew, of course, though I had been in America so short a time, that it is dangerous to allow oneself to fall a victim to this sort of familiarity, for there "typage" among women is so much a national cult that the stranger may often grow confused among the women he meets, thinking each the replica of the other. No. This one had a much more definite suggestion of familiarity than that. It was not so much her appearance as the way she moved her head, her hands, her arms. I had seen her before.

I resisted the first impulse to speak to her. After all, seeking an introduction by claiming to have met a woman before is one of the oldest—and most transparent—stratagems in the world, and was likely to meet with short shrift at the hands of an American girl who most certainly knew all the answers.

Besides, I was not even sure, and I might easily be deluding myself, for I was certainly feeling lonely and in need of a little companionship, especially if it was feminine. Next day I was due to fly to Honolulu, and I would have liked nothing better than to have had a sociable evening. But I could not persuade myself that this was excuse enough to try to scrape an acquaintance. For all that the feeling that I knew her returned again and again.

Then, as though in commentary on my inclinations, I caught sight of the magazine she was reading—more than that, of the page at which it was turned back. My own name stared out at me. *George Borodin*. It was one of the articles that I had written on wartime surgery in England and that were now being serialised in one of the American weeklies. This surely was the finger of fate. At once I determined to take action according to the best military precepts and advance boldly on my objective without subterfuge, either obvious or concealed.

I smiled at her.

"Nice day," I remarked.

She looked at me blankly. Then her eyes turned towards the window. It was almost possible to read her thoughts, which were hardly complimentary. "Any fool," she was saying to herself, "knows that it's a nice day. It always is. Today isn't any nicer than any other day over the past fortnight or month. What the hell's the matter with him?"

It was a very stupid thing to say, but then I had forgotten I was in California and not in England, and that remarks about the niceness of the weather had an air of oddity—even insanity—about them. For it is only in England that nice days are so great a rarity as to inspire enthusiastic comment, and the weather remarkable enough to form the bases of long and varied conversations.

Hastily I tried a new line of approach.

"Forgive me," I said, "I've an idea I know you. No," I added, "it's not just the old gag. I really do think so. But apart from that, I was wondering how you liked the article you're reading."

She eyed me with a rather curious smile. "No. You don't know me," she said, in quite a friendly way. "But it's quite

likely you've seen me some time. My name's Knight—Alyne Knight."

So that was it! I had seen—and admired—Alyne Knight (though that is not her real name) dozens of times on the screen. Often had she appeared in those American hospital films which, until I had come to Washington, I had thought too good to be true.

"As for the article—" She made an expressive gesture that was hardly flattering. "I just don't believe a word of it."

I laughed. I could not help it. And it turned out to be the best thing I could have done. For she joined in, and there's nothing like a laugh for cementing a friendship.

"I'm sorry about that," I said. "You see, I happen to be George Borodin, and I wrote it."

She laughed again with real merriment.

"And I suppose it's all true—every word," she remarked.

"Perhaps I wouldn't go as far as that." I replied. "But I give you my word that ninety-five per cent. is cold, sober truth and the other five per cent. is—well, just writer's licence."

"I guess those are the bits I found interesting. There weren't many of them," she said.

Operation Introduction had succeeded. I found myself taking immensely to this girl, who in the flesh was far more attractive than ever I had seen her on the screen. That is more than one can say of a good many actors or actresses in any country, and I make the statement as a sincere compliment. But having written that, I am not sure it is not an impertinence on my part to try to pay compliments to one who does not need them.

We had another ice-cream soda together, and our talk ranged far and wide, for I found her intelligent and of wide interests. To my surprise I found that she was not merely acting in the medical films in which I had seen her so frequently. She knew quite a lot about nursing and was under no illusions that it was, in reality, even a quarter as glamorous and amusing as Hollywood's producers, directors, script-writers, combine to present it. She had a lot of wise—and sometimes witty—things to say on this subject; they made a deep and refreshing impression on me.

With surprise we noticed that it had come round to six o'clock.

"I'm glad I met you," I said sincerely. "It'll be one more pleasant memory to take with me when I fly tomorrow to Honolulu."

She opened her eyes. "No kidding?" she asked.

I shook my head. "On the bright," I said, borrowing the Shirley Temple phrase, at which she laughed.

"Well, can you beat that?" she demanded. "I'm due out on that Skymaster, too."

"It looks as though we were made to meet," I returned, not at all displeased with the news. "That sounds as though I'm trying to qualify as one of your script-writers, doesn't it?"

She smiled. "Nothing like it's happened to me in years," she commented.

It seemed too good an opportunity to be missed. Clearly it was an occasion for celebration, and on the spur of the moment I suggested she should dine with me. Rather to my surprise and greatly to my delight, she accepted.

"But I'll have to ask your advice," I told her. "I've not been here long enough to know my way about."

I placed myself in good hands. Naturally she knew all there was to know about restaurants in San Francisco, where it is even more important than in London to have a list of those to avoid. There could be no questioning her taste in these matters. It was a marvellous occasion. The food was of a kind which is barely a memory in England and the menu included many things which, I think, have never found their way to London. And no one could have wished for more sparkling or fascinating company. I found that there were one or two disadvantages about dining in public with a celebrated film star. Much too much attention, I thought, was concentrated on our table, though she, no doubt through long conditioning, did not seem to notice it.

At the time I thought all this was only evanescent curiosity, so it was a little of a shock when, some months later in Australia, I received a cutting from a newspaper, in which a society columnist had reported (with highly imaginative touches) his own full account of the whole affair, with the inevitable innuendos. That Miss Knight and I were to fly on the same plane had not, of course, escaped the all-seeing eyes of the American journalist,

and that fact provided the writer with juicy meat from which he extracted the last ounce of spicy flavour. Well, perhaps in other circumstances I should not have been so displeased if some of his implied suggestions had been true, but they were well wide of the mark. Miss Knight did not so much as ask me back to her place for a last drink, though Hollywood movies had led me to believe that that practice was a universal, almost obligatory, social custom.

Shortly before ten o'clock next morning I hurried to the airport to catch the Skymaster from which, at long last, I was to savour the first glimpse of my cherished goal. I admit that my thoughts were, for the moment, somewhat preoccupied by Miss Knight. But even those thoughts were temporarily obliterated by the sudden appearance of three airline stewardesses, who proceeded to take charge of me with charming efficiency.

True to the American tradition, each was a "type," One was a perfect Gainsborough reproduction of Veronica Lake, hair, eyes, attitude and even intonation. If she had dispensed with the smart uniform she was wearing and donned a sarong, the second might easily have passed for Dorothy Lamour. The third, however, was more subtle, in that she was a version of Greta Garbo—one could imagine that voice airing a wish to be alone—imposed on the personality of pistol-packing momma, Marjorie Maine; it was an extremely effective combination.

Whatever one might think of this lack of true individuality in appearance, there could be no denying the overwhelming efficiency of these young women in their jobs. From the moment they greeted passengers at the airport, they spared no effort to make our journey as pleasant as it could possibly be. They seemed to know one's every wish before it was expressed, and they were ready to make suggestions not only for greater comfort on the trip but also for entertainment at our destination.

As the complete stranger and Britisher who had never been to Honolulu, I received a lot of special attention—so much, in fact, that I did not get very much opportunity of renewing my acquaintance with Miss Knight. One of the girls—"Dorothy Lamour"—offered to take me round the night clubs in Honolulu, where I could see the famous can-can and hula-hula being

danced. It was an attractive suggestion from a number of points of view, and I was almost on the point of accepting when I happened to glance up and met Alyne Knight's eyes.

They are very blue eyes. And they are also very expressive eyes. I doubt whether at any time on the screen they can have been more expressive than they were then, for their message was quite unmistakable. It was just as if she had spoken the words to me :

"So you're just the same as any other man?" they seemed to say. "You fall for all the professional tricks, and you feel you've made a big hit. O.K.—get on with it if you feel that way. But can't you see she does this to every man who looks a likely customer—it's her job to? She gets a rake-off from all those clubs, 'bet your life."

The warning—if the look was meant that way and was not just plain mockery—came just in time. I declined the offer with many thanks. The stewardesses lost immediate interest in me, though retaining their utter efficiency in their primary job, and turned their attentions elsewhere. I was not sorry, for it enabled me to talk to Alyne Knight.

"I guess we can get around without their help," she commented, nodding to "Miss Lamour," now in conversation with a middle-aged business man in rimless spectacles. "I've been in Honolulu before, and believe me there's no easier place to part with your bankroll—no, not even New York."

Rather relieved at my escape, I placed myself under her guidance. She promised that I should see both the can-can and the hula-hula, if I wanted to.

"And you'd better," she remarked. "Visiting Honolulu without seeing them is like being in Washington without seeing the White House or in London without going to the Tower of London."

I nodded. I did not tell her, with regard to her last words, that there were thousands of true Londoners who had never been in the Tower of London, and, indeed, had only hazy notions of where it was.

No doubt to hundreds of thousands of film-fans the idea of being shown round Honolulu by a major star would be something not far short of a vision of paradise. On the general prin-

ciple I cannot pronounce judgment, but I do know that Alyne Knight proved a most knowledgeable and informative guide, not least because she enriched everything with that naïveté which makes the Americans the perfect sightseers. I say that entirely without malice or intended offence, though I admit it does sound a little "superior." But it is that capacity for wonder, almost childlike in its expression, which makes the Americans get so much more out of travel and entertainment than the English, whose ideal is to show as little emotion as possible, and to reveal neither surprise nor dislike at anything.

Everything seemed set fair for an entertaining and enjoyable visit to Honolulu under better conditions than I could possibly have foreseen. I was introduced to some friends of Miss Knight's and everyone made a determined effort that I should miss nothing. We dined. We toured round the town. And late in the evening we saw the can-can and the hula-hula. At the end of it I found myself decorated with the traditional wreath of flowers—and, strange to say, I did not feel in the least embarrassed.

I have lived in England for a good many years now, and I have acquired a good many English things besides a formal British nationality. Among them, I think, must be a little of that scepticism, cynicism, hypocrisy—call it what you like—to which I referred just now. It showed itself during those exhibition dances. They were thrilling and spectacular—magnificent entertainment, and my companions, though they had seen them not once but many times before, grew wildly enthusiastic. Yet I could not resist the feeling that they were just a little sophisticated, bearing as much resemblance, perhaps, to the real native dances as the music of, say, Xavier Cugat's band does to the original rhythms of Central and South America and the Caribbean islands. They had been refined—and in some details exaggerated, it may be—for presentation to Western eyes and ears. There is nothing wrong in that, of course. No doubt the originals would seem crude and meaningless and even occasionally outrageous to the civilised mind. They might possibly attract the unwelcome attention of the censorship authorities where such exist. But the distinction is worth the making. Speaking for myself, I had not come all this way to see the life and culture of the Pacific Islands decked out for

PACIFIC GATEWAY

Western eyes and ears, but to try to catch a glimpse of the real thing before "progress" had entirely swept it away. And that unhappy day is now unlikely to be long postponed. The great Powers, and especially America, have woken up to the importance of the Pacific from the strategical standpoint. If current plans mature, the Pacific seems destined to become little more or less than a chain of naval stations, air bases and fortresses. Moreover, if the Bikini experiments are continued, those parts which are not fortified will probably be utterly destroyed. Once, the South Seas stood for peace, for isolation; they were the goal of those who sought complete escape from civilisation, the place where time stood still. The hand of the West is now descending on them even more heavily than before, and perhaps one may doubt if it is bringing civilisation. Rather it is planting in the Pacific (how ironic that name seems now!) the seeds that come from civilisation in decay, the horrible outgrowths of war and preparation for war and destruction—outgrowths that appear to the medical mind as cancers on the body politic.

These reflections, which I least of all would claim as original, have for me perhaps a special significance, for my introduction to the Pacific, after those first few hours of tourists' paradise, was stormy in the extreme. I looked on destruction in its most terrible form. I heard again, as I had heard in England during the war, the cry of the suffering and looked once more on the maimed, on whose broken bodies I worked. But it was not the powers of destruction that man is so successful in arrogating to himself which were the cause of all this. Instead, it was the unleashed forces of Nature, let loose as if to show the upstart Man that he is still far from conquering her. And, it might be fancifully thought, intended to demonstrate to him that he has a vaster, more important war to wage than the one he fights against his fellow men.

Now in grim earnest I was brought face to face with reality—the reality of Nature's extremism in the Pacific, though not perhaps the reality for which I had come to seek.

CHAPTER IV

Havoc in Hawaii

It began soon after midnight. The low, angry rumble in the distance woke, for no apparent reason, memories of the blitz in my mind—memories that I had thought to be dormant ; and it seemed to me that at any moment the long-drawn wail of the sirens would rend the air. Perhaps it was a premonition. At any rate, there was no overt cause of my disquieting thoughts for a party of us were in a café making merry in a riotous way. Looking back on it, I cannot help feeling that it is a wonder we heard anything at all ; our own noise might well have been sufficient to drown an extraneous one.

But hear it we did. Others heard it, too, and to them it meant something more than it did to us, to whom it was just a roll of thunder, the harbinger, it might be, of some tropical storm. A sudden hush fell on everyone, so that we ourselves stilled our laughter and found ourselves listening with the same tense anxiety as the majority of those around us. The effect was extraordinary. At one moment, gay humanity was laughing, singing, dancing, making music. The next, all was quiet, like birds during an eclipse of the sun. But more impressive than the quiet among the people, who had been hushed as it were by a single drum beat, was the feeling of fear that clamped down on everyone, even on us, who did not fully realise what was about to occur.

The roll went on, growing ever louder and more menacing. I cast a quick, inquiring look at the manager of the café, and asked what it meant. Unconsciously I spoke in a whisper. It was the natural thing to do.

“The tidal wave,” he said as softly. “It began in the Aleutians—we had warning. But we did not expect it so soon. You had better take your friends home—quickly. Do not wait for the bill, sir. You can pay me some other time—if either of us is here,” he added.

There could be no disputing the terror in both his tone and his manner. Nor was it, I felt, an unreasoning terror, like the average native's fear of thunderstorms. We were standing face to face with disaster, and there was no time to lose. Yet even then I found the trivial thought—the utterly irrelevant—crossing my mind, as it so often does at such moments. I wondered—and it made me smile slightly—what sort of thing it was that scared a café manager into saying that I need not wait for the bill. In all my experience, this was unique; and probably it will remain so.

Pleasure-seeking and relaxation were at an end. I nodded to my companions and we rose hurriedly. Luckily, our host had a car with him, and we all piled into it and drove away furiously and in a manner that was hardly safe on that road. But no one was worrying about being run over or wondering if the car would overturn. Such dangers were slight and of no account at all.

We reached the hotel just in time. The storm broke.

I shall not attempt to describe it. It is beyond my powers and perhaps the powers of any man to do so. All I am conscious of, so far as the elements were concerned, was a noise that filled everything and bore in on one's ears with almost physical force, of a tearing, rushing wind that had more the quality of a steady jet of cold steam than that of any wind we know in Europe, and of the noise of havoc.

Yet the roar of the storm did not entirely blot out other sounds. Again and again, above the howl, above the crash of falling houses and trees and the rushing of the water, there came the cry of people in pain—not one voice or two but many, so that at last it seemed to me like a continual chorus. My premonition had been right: this was the blitz over again, but a greater blitz, one planned not on man's petty scale but in nature's cosmic pattern.

Someone spoke to me. To this day I do not know who it was. All I can remember is that it surprised me that a human voice could make itself heard above such a noise that suggested to me the break-up of the entire world.

"Guess the hospital's got its hands full," said the voice.

I do not know if it was intended as a hint, but it certainly served as one. In a moment I knew that there was work for me to do, just as there had been once in the air raids. It would not be patching and mending—but it would be the saving of human lives.

Without a word I left the hotel and somehow or other found my way to the hospital. And here again my memory is blank. I do not know how I got there but get there I did.

My offer of assistance was accepted at once. The superintendent was far too worried and busy to waste time on courtesies. His manner was brief.

"Want every doctor I can lay hands on," he jerked, and told nurse to show me the way to the operating theatre.

For two days and two nights the storm raged, sweeping over the island and leaving havoc and suffering behind it. The material havoc I was not to see till a little later, but the suffering I witnessed from the moment I stepped in the hospital was unforgettable.

The place was already full, and for several days the injured and stricken continued to come in a steady stream. Here were casualties on a scale I had never considered possible; there seemed no end to them. Some were only slightly injured and could be sent away at once after an emergency dressing or a brief rest. There were others—and they were many—for whom it was possible to do little except ease their ebbing moments with the great anodyne of morphine—surely one of the most beneficial discoveries of man. As for the rest—it was emergency work, because there was no time for anything else. The old motto of the Emergency Medical Service rang through my head: Send 'Em Back Alive! But, alas! it was not possible to do that for every one of them.

Most of the injuries were due to crushing, caused by falling houses or trees. It was a terrible enough sight and experience, yet, comparing the two at leisure, I do not think the cases themselves were, on the whole, quite so distressing as those caused by air raids or by battle. For this reason, even though we were desperately hard pressed, we were in most instances able to do a better job for these unhappy people.

No, it is not the physical injuries that stand out most clearly in my memory—and that is not because I am a doctor rendered callous by long experience. It is the mental side of it all that most shook me. These people were of all types—men, women, children. The majority of them were natives. Some came from the town, others were brought in from the villages outside.

HAVOC IN HAWAII

There were poor ones and rich ones. There were naturally happy ones and incurably miserable ones. They formed, in fact, a complete microcosm of the population, and there were infinite differences between them.

Yet in one thing they were all alike. On every face I saw, deeply carved so that often it almost obliterated the lines of suffering, was the imprint of fear. And when these unhappy people could talk, as many could, their words were not of their sufferings. Always they spoke of the terror that had come upon them. The gods were a-thirst. This was no ordinary visitation such as not infrequently breaks up the peace of these favoured lands. It was the gods' revenge.

For years, they pointed out, man had been waging war in the Pacific. He had brought ever new and more terrible weapons to the task, until at last he had found one which could annihilate whole populations in the course of a minute or so. And the gods—or God, if the speaker happened to be Christian, for creed made no difference to this universally held belief—were putting man in his place.

It was the Deluge in a new form, the punishment of a supernatural power for men who had broken every moral law. And what was happening at that moment in Hawaii would happen, in due course, to everyone in the whole world. The white man would not escape. His punishment might be the last but it would also be the most terrible.

When I said that this belief was universal, I meant the word in its most literal sense. I did not find a single exception to this, and that was what made it all so terrifying. How these mass beliefs arise spontaneously at these moments of stress is something for the anthropologist and the psychologist to explain. All I can do is to vouch for the immense impression this unanimity makes, until at last one begins to share in the fear oneself and accept unquestioningly the belief that inspires it.

Never before have I worked so long on casualties. There were moments when, despite short rests, I felt I could go on no more. But still the ambulances and stretchers came—many of them improvised from the abundant wreckage on all sides—and somehow one found strength to continue. In the end I lost all sense of time, not knowing whether it was day or night.

I hardly believed my own senses when the superintendent took my arm and led me to a quiet room where, miraculously, there was a bed with clean white sheets upon it.

"You need some sleep," he said tersely. "Guess we can handle the rest of them now—very few coming in. The worst's over. Thanks a lot for all you've done."

I did not need his thanks, though I knew they were sincere. I was so exhausted I could barely undress and tumble into bed. And then, tantalisingly, sleep eluded me, till at last I fell into a stupor, though it was filled with strange fantasies. One of them I clearly remember : it was of a long line of injured people, a line stretching away into the horizon, while above them hovered a spirit of evil destruction, laughing at their cries of pain.

Next day, refreshed in body by a long sleep, though still mentally flat, I left the hospital. The superintendent very taciturnly thanked me again and I like to think that those crowded hours were not uselessly spent, and that a few of the people of Hawaii benefited from the attention I was able to give them. That was the only reward I asked.

But, despite the laconic superintendent, I had not heard the last of the matter, and though this reminder did not come till some time later, when I was in far-off Sydney, this seems the place to record it, in order to round off the story of the experience.

It came in the form of a letter from the Chief Medical Officer of Honolulu, and it was written, so he said, officially on behalf of the health authorities of the island. It spoke in unnecessarily glowing terms of the help I had given, and even said that people were asking who was the surgeon who had come from nowhere and then departed—had he been a spirit?—a thought that caused me some amusement, as no doubt it would to any who knows my somewhat solid frame. But the letter ended on a more personal note :—

"Hawaii stands in great need of more good surgeons," it concluded, "and if ever you thought of settling in the island, you would be more than welcome, for you will find that you are not forgotten. The rules for qualification are simple ; any properly qualified medical man who resides in the island for one whole year automatically receives permission to practise. . . ."

HAVOC IN HAWAII

It was another invitation to the many I had already received on this short trip ; and I think, without in any way belittling the others, that it is the one I prize most. Perhaps one day, when the strain of practice in the hurrying West becomes too much for me, I may accept it, to end my days as the heroes of my boyhood's reading ended theirs alongside the waters of the Pacific. But that must lie in the not too near future ; and experience has taught me not to pry into the future.

Now that my temporary association with the hospital was over, I was able to get about and see something of what the storm had done. I had expected to see devastation, but my imagination had been quite unequal to creating a picture of what I did actually find.

I had come to Hawaii and found it an island of peace—a land that seemed to fulfil all the promises of romance that writers of both books and songs, and makers of moving pictures, have made on its behalf. And in forty-eight hours it had been turned into a veritable shambles. Havoc was everywhere. All except the most solid buildings had collapsed. It looked as though the forests themselves had been crushed flat.

There are modern motoring roads in Hawaii. They had become impassable tracks, blocked by the remains of uprooted giant trees, and their surfaces torn up so that they were little more than rubble heaps. The village in which I had seen the hula danced was now marked only by a few walls that stood up like gravestones. Here and there the earth itself had been disrupted, and water gushed up in fountains from great cracks in the ground.

Hawaii is not densely populated, and bare figures of casualties give little idea of the scale of the cataclysm. But those figures should be recorded. During that tidal wave more than two hundred people were killed—or, more tragically, had disappeared without leaving behind them any trace. Something like five thousand people were rendered homeless—and there were few places left standing where they could find even temporary shelter.

That was the story of the present. But the storm had taken toll not only of the day but also of the morrow. Ruin stared the survivors in the face.

ONE HORIZON

Hawaii depends almost entirely on its sugar crop for its livelihood. The storm had left none of that standing. Indeed, it was difficult in some places to recognise that fields had ever existed there, for nothing but swamp and fallen trees could be seen.

Yet that was not the worst of it. The tidal wave could scarcely have occurred at a more critical moment. The war had affected Hawaii as it had all other parts of the world, and shortage of shipping had caused a considerable stock to mount up in the warehouses. There was, so I was told, the equivalent of two years' good crops awaiting shipment when the storm struck. And now there was none of it left. The warehouses that held it, like the fields that had raised it, were no more. They had been swept bodily into the sea, together with all they contained.

If the present was black enough with its suffering and privation, the future offered cold comfort. But even before I left there was news that the United States Government, which is always energetic in these matters, was taking steps to organise relief, first to alleviate the widespread human suffering and then to take steps towards rehabilitation. No land, whether stricken by man or by nature, ever stood in greater need of help and succour.

It was natural, especially after the belief of the population, that I should fall to comparing this havoc with that which man accomplished in the six years of total war. In England and elsewhere I had seen enough war damage to give some idea of the scale of man's destruction. I had read of what Japan had done at Pearl Harbour in 1941, and even more what the atomic bomb had compassed in Hiroshima. All that was appalling enough. At Pearl Harbour a fleet had been destroyed. In Hiroshima a town had passed away.

Yet nothing of it has the same dread air of this devastation by the hand of nature. The more one saw, the more one sympathised with the view that this was a revenge of the gods.

If indeed it were that, it was a sardonic one, for it gave an example of destruction that not even annihilation-crazy man could hope to copy. And it taught the lesson, grimly but convincingly, that the only outcome of devastation is suffering and extinction. Perhaps from things like these man may eventually see the light of reason and turn from his habitual prostitution of

HAVOC IN HAWAII

the power of human ingenuity and the inventiveness of the human mind. If havoc such as this is really man's ideal, to which he strives with unceasing effort, then, indeed, there is no need for anyone to scoff at Freud's postulation of a death-wish, opposing the life-drive and equal to or stronger than the latter, in the human character.

Suffering, say the moralists, brings out the best in man, reveals his heroism and his endurance. That may be true in one sense—and when the matter is viewed from the comfortable depths of a philosopher's armchair. But let those who believe this witness first hand the effects of a tidal wave in the Pacific and they will see little good in suffering. There are other and better channels through which the river of man's higher virtues may be directed, and they will bring not devastation but happiness.

I did not spend much more time among this scene. There was nothing more I could do, and I confess that I was anxious to get away from it. Though it might be true that the Pacific had reserved one of her major demonstrations for my arrival, it was one with which I would gladly have dispensed. Nor was I alone in that feeling. I doubt whether any set of travellers ever left Hawaii with a greater sense of relief than those who flew with me on the Skymaster.

There are traditional ceremonies of farewell that have made Hawaii famous, but for us they were not performed; and I do not think anyone missed them. No songs were sung, no guitars played, no leis were given by laughing native girls. The only sounds that reached our ears were the wailing of the natives as, destitute, they wandered round what had once been the docks, wondering where next they could find shelter for the night, and their begging cries for a few cents so that they could stand a chance of getting a little food.

It was a sad farewell, very different from anything I had imagined. The romance of Hawaii had been stillborn in me, and I shall always associate its name with the greatest, most widespread suffering I have ever seen.

And so, as I say, we embarked on the launch that was to take us out to the waiting Skymaster with few personal regrets, though with a deep and sad sympathy for the wretched islanders who could not, as we were about to do, leave Hawaii and its horrors behind

them. We turned our eyes seawards, and it was as though we were looking at another world.

The great flying-boat, lying almost listlessly at her moorings, was even more beautiful than I had thought her to be. A gentle sun was smiling down on her, and the clear blue sky and the equally clear blue sea were a perfect setting for the craft. One glanced back on a scene of devastation ; one glanced forward to a perfect expression of the joys of hope. In some curious way the vision of that Skymaster restored a sense of values. Man was not wholly good or wholly bad ; he was neither destined to supreme happiness at all times nor to utter destitution. He had it in him to find his way to the stars. Somehow this delicately formed flying-boat typified the aspiring spirit of mankind.

As the Skymaster taxied across the water, I again looked back. From the sea, Hawaii did not look much changed from what it had seemed when I had arrived. The clear-cut, sparkling straight wake cut by the boat reminded me of the firm, decided line which some people place beneath their signatures, bringing their letters to a final and decisive conclusion.

It was the end of another chapter in this extraordinarily eventful trip—and of another chapter of a life that has brought me to strange scenes and shown me stranger experiences. We were bound for the Fiji Islands, and I wondered what new adventures they might hold in store for me. It was one of the few occasions in my life when I hoped that I might discover nothing but uneventful peace, when I longed for nothing more than the opportunity of lolling back in complete idleness to live the life, for a little while, of a leisured tourist.

But it was not to be. I might travel the world round, it seemed, but I could never out-distance my destiny.

CHAPTER V

Royal Surgeon

For a little while I was left blissfully in ignorance of the next appointment I had with adventure. I lay back in my seat, looking first at the sea and losing myself in contemplation. Perhaps I even dozed a little—I do not know. Then I began to come back to life and look around me to see who were my fellow travellers. Diagonally opposite me was a very attractive girl, whose clear-cut features and auburn hair were alone sufficient to make one forget, if only for a while, the havoc left behind in Hawaii. I decided that the journey might not be entirely without congenial company after all.

There was no time then to try to establish contact. Lunch was served. It was a magnificent meal—I have had many, many worse in fashionable restaurants ashore. As a good meal does when I am in the mood, it ministered not a little to my general sense of well-being. Life was good, whatever its hazards. This was holiday at last and cares could be forgotten. As I relaxed in my chair I turned over ways and means of making the acquaintance of the auburn-haired beauty. There was no reason why I should not. The odds were not nearly so heavily against it as they had been in the San Francisco café when I had met Alyne Knight.

I had just made up my mind that no subtlety was needed and a direct, friendly approach was quite sufficient and properly in order for a fellow traveller in the comparatively restricted space of a flying-boat cabin when the steward came towards me. He was the man who had served that delicious meal, and I wondered what it was he now had in store for me. A drink? Some exotic fruit whose acquaintance I had not yet made?

It was none of these; and if I had not been in such a mood of absorbed contentedness, I should have taken his very first words as an inauspicious omen.

ONE HORIZON

The steward was a mild little man, with something of the air and turn of phrase of the English manservant so beloved of the Hollywood screen. Perhaps at some time or other he had been a small-part player ; it seems a minor national sport in the United States.

He bowed slightly as he stopped at my elbow.

" I think I am right, sir," he said formally, " in assuming that you are the gentleman described as a doctor in the sailing list ? "

" Yes," I replied lazily. I did not even resent being thus reminded of my profession though my mood was one of complete forgetfulness of the workaday world.

" Then in that case, sir," he continued apologetically but unfailingly deferential, " I wonder if you would be good enough to follow me to speak to the captain? He wished to apologise for troubling you, sir, but I gather the need is urgent."

Urgent ! I threw off my sense of euphoria. I cursed the day I had ever taken it into my head to become a doctor. I pronounced anathema on all these rules and regulations of the modern world that make it impossible for a man to shake off his professional, conventional self and travel round the world under a simple alias with no description, title, rank, or profession at all.

Yet when a responsible person like the steward of an air liner comes to a doctor with an urgent request, there is only one thing a doctor can do. He answers the appeal with as good a grace as he can command. And a life spent in having one's leisure moments interrupted by urgent calls and one's sleep disturbed by irascible telephone bells enables a doctor to assume a very good grace indeed—on the surface. I hope that, despite my thoughts, I did nothing to disgrace the reputation of my calling.

I was led into that part of the machine which airmen, at any rate British ones, call, I believe, " the office." There I found the captain and the radio operator, both with expressions that hovered between anxiety and apology.

" What's the trouble ? " I asked.

The skipper, a man in his late thirties, black haired, and with keen, small eyes, shrugged slightly—a typical American gesture.

" Sorry to trouble you, doctor, but this looks like a job for you," he replied. " We've just picked up a radio signal from a small island in the Fiji Group—a distress call for a surgeon—not just a

doc. but a surgeon. I was just wondering if we could radio back you'd be ready in an hour's time. Looks like it's urgent, you see. We call at Suva as you know, and we stop up there two days for refuelling. You could get across in a launch and fix things up and I guess we'd wait around for you if you got held up."

I raised my eyebrows a little. It was not so much that I was surprised at receiving an urgent call in this fashion—one grows used to surprises—as that I thought he was taking a little too much for granted. He had not even asked me if I would undertake the case, yet he had all the arrangements cut and dried. I looked at him again. He was the sort of man who makes decisions and "figures out the know-how," as he would doubtless have put it, automatically.

"All right," I said, but without any great enthusiasm. "I'll do what I can, and I'll leave all the arrangements to you."

It seemed rather unnecessary to add that last sentence, as I could not imagine he would allow anyone else to fix up things.

He nodded as though that was what he had expected, and I grew a little resentful again.

"O.K., doc.," he said. "I'll fix it. Thanks a lot."

No more was said, and I was conducted by the steward—whose obsequiousness seemed to me now some kind of studied compensation for the captain's brusqueness—back to my seat in the cabin. As I resettled myself I sighed, feeling at first annoyed at this interruption of the holiday mood which had possessed me; but after a little while I found my curiosity rising. I wondered what this emergency case might be, and I recalled how fortunate it was that I had brought my instruments with me. It had been only an afterthought that I had packed them in England. On air-trips they subtracted valuable weight from my personal baggage allowance, yet already they had proved a godsend, both for my lecture-demonstrations in the United States and, later, for that eventful period in Honolulu.

For just over an hour I occupied myself with speculations and reflections, and when the boat touched down at Suva I was already looking forward to the expedition with some eagerness. I had come to the Pacific in search of adventure and experience, and in the short time I had been there I was finding both in plenty—though perhaps they were not quite the sort of adventures

I had imagined in my more fanciful moments. Time and again I was being reminded that a doctor can never forget he is a doctor.

Two launches were waiting at the anchorage for the flying-boat. One was the usual tender to ferry the passengers to the shore, the other had been detailed to take me to the island, which the radio operator told me was Tonga-Tonga—not altogether an unfamiliar name to me. I was not to be allowed to set foot on shore before I was whisked away. So far from upsetting me, this arrangement added to my mounting feeling of excitement and anticipation.

I heard the captain giving some orders in his curt, direct way, and saw him talking to one of the airline officials, who nodded apparently in agreement, and I wondered what further “fixing” this determined man had done on my behalf. I was soon to know. He informed me very tersely that he intended to come with me, and further that the radio operator, whose equipment needed no attention, was also to be of the party. This news came gratefully to me. At least these two were not entire strangers and would do something to allay the slight apprehension I was beginning to experience. More than ever I was glad I had those instruments with me. Not only did they put me in a frame of mind in which I was ready to tackle anything within reason, but they had the psychological effect of bracing me and giving me confidence, though I was still in doubt what I was to encounter. The case might be beyond me, if only because facilities might not exist for a possible major operation.

The trip was too short for me to indulge in much speculation however, for in what seemed to me an incredibly short time I was being hauled on to a jetty. This was Tonga-Tonga, but I had no opportunity of admiring the view.

With his abrupt nod, the captain directed my attention to a long line of native dignitaries drawn up at the landward end of the jetty.

“Looks like they’ve heard you’re coming,” he remarked.

I gazed in astonishment at this imposing delegation of welcome, but my astonishment turned quickly to hilarious amusement, which I quelled only with the greatest difficulty. For these people, so solemn and formal, were standing in front of the car

that was to carry me to my final destination. And as I stared at it I realised that "final" might have a very literal significance indeed.

If I described it as the oldest car in the world, no doubt I should invoke the ire of the competitors in the annual London to Brighton race, who would pelt me with pedigrees and historical data for which I have little stomach. But that is certainly how it appeared to me. I do not know when it was built, nor what vicissitudes of fortune brought it to the remoter parts of the Pacific to spend its last days as a Royal Coach. It was a real collector's piece, worth its weight in gold to an antique dealer—or to a comedian bent on outdoing the late Harry Tate.

The sight was too much for the radio-operator, who hastily ducked down again into the launch to hide his mirth in the cabin. Somehow or other I managed to keep a straight face and so preserve the dignity and seemliness of the reception ceremony. The best thing to do was to take everything—even the car—for granted, if the risk of offending these solemn people was to be avoided. Solemn they undoubtedly were. I was expecting to hear at any moment that my prospective patient had already died, but I gathered that this was not so. This intelligence made me feel impatient at the formalities with which they greeted me. No doubt it was conferring a great honour on me, but all I could feel about it at the moment was that it was wasting a great deal of valuable time.

At last the ceremonial was completed and we—the captain, the radio-operator, myself, and sundry native dignitaries—were packed into the waiting car. It was an anxious moment waiting to see what would happen, and I almost cheered aloud when, with a violent jerk that threw us all forward, the aged vehicle staggered forward. There is no doubt whatsoever that it would have been much quicker to walk; by the standards of London, New York, or Paris, it would also have been considerably more dignified. But that was not the local view. This was the Royal Coach, the sign of High Privilege, which put the native on a par with the white man; and it was obviously in their eyes a very great honour indeed to be allowed to ride in it.

After a little while the car ceased its spasmodic progress, and a halt was called while water from a can was poured over the

engine to bring it down once more to a safe working temperature. It was a proceeding that caused the technically-minded captain and radio-operator some very disquieting moments, for they told me afterwards that they expected at any moment that the cylinder casting would crack under this brutal treatment. Apparently it was quite a normal affair, however, and no doubt the engine had grown used to it, for the process was repeated not once but twice. Three times we halted and the Ritual of the Cooling was performed. Glancing at my watch when, at last, I was invited to alight, I saw that it had taken just over two hours to cover a distance of what could not have been more than a mile and a half. Thinking of the "urgent call" that had been flashed over the radio I cursed myself for not having insisted on walking and risking paying the chief an unintended insult.

It was the royal village to which we had come after this fantastic journey, and it presented a most remarkable sight. The entire population had turned out to welcome us—though "welcome" does not seem quite the appropriate word. Never before had I heard such a chorus of groaning, wailing, and occasional screaming. Moreover, it was organised, no doubt in accordance with some ritual of which I, a greenhorn in these parts, was ignorant. Afterwards I learnt that this was the Death March, reserved for occasions of the deepest gloom involving the reigning house.

Though I had already gathered that I had been called to attend a person of royal rank, it was not till that moment of arrival that I learnt, through one of the dignitaries who spoke some sort of English, that it was the heir to the throne who lay at death's door. Not only that, he was the only male child of the native queen, and the calamity was looked upon not merely as disastrous in itself but also as the result of some powerful curse on the royal family. Only because of the desperate situation had the queen allowed herself to be persuaded to call in the powerful aid of the white man.

At a sign from the leader of the reception committee—which seems the most compact way of referring to this collection of dignitaries—we moved forward slowly. As we did so the wailing natives closed in behind us to form a huge cortege. I must confess that the effect was most impressive. They moved forward as though inspired by a single spirit of lamentation. Their

heads lolled forward on their breasts, their knees sagged slightly, as though the burden of their sorrow was too heavy for them to bear; and their shoulders drooped so that their arms hung pendulously. As they walked they stamped their feet in rhythm with their monotonous wailing. It was an experience I would not have missed for the world.

Now we drew near to a hut so richly decorated that it dominated the whole village. At its doorway the reception committee stood aside in the manner of a guard of honour, and we three white men walked into the presence of the queen and her consort. They bowed low and deferentially towards us. There was no chamberlain to prompt us with the correct etiquette for the occasion and accordingly we bowed in return. An awkward silence ensued.

"Well, doc., I reckon it's up to you," whispered the captain of the Skymaster; and I am still not quite sure whether his tone did or did not imply that if he had been in my place he would have taken the situation masterfully in hand.

It was a difficult situation. The dignitary who had spoken to me in English was at the tail end of the queue, and clearly I could not call him forward. No doubt he would have broken innumerable rules of precedence if he had joined me. I could not expect that either the queen or those near her would speak English—at any rate of the kind that would enable me to get the information I needed about the case. I was nonplussed. And then, as always, the unexpected happened.

I was just about to try to inquire by signs where the patient lay when I heard a voice. It was a woman's voice, and it spoke English with an obvious American accent.

"Which of you is the doctor?" it asked.

I turned quickly—as did my two white companions—and found myself face to face with a small, wiry-looking woman who had an air of great competence. She smiled at my obvious surprise at finding her there, and in a few words explained her position. She was the district nurse, and a native of higher caste than all but the queen; she had learnt her job at one of the American colleges in the Pacific. She it was who had persuaded the queen to have the radio call sent out from Suva.

These explanations were enough for the time being, though I

found myself deeply interested in this young woman's work. The principal—indeed the only—consideration for the moment was the patient.

"Where is he?" I asked.

She signed to me to follow. Passing behind a beaded curtain I found myself in a small cubicle. Here, in a bed of plaited straw, raised on some sort of frame about three feet from the ground, lay a young boy. On his face was an expression of the deepest anguish. His knees were drawn up almost to his chin, and his hands clutched at his abdomen. Not for a single moment was he still, and beads of perspiration, inspired as much by fear and pain as by the fever, streamed down his cheeks. I judged his age at about ten years. But lying there in his agony he looked more like a shrivelled, grotesque old man.

The nurse looked at me as though there could be no doubt about the diagnosis—which was quite true. This was a typical case of acute appendicitis; more than that, it was one that called for immediate operation.

"Appendicitis," I whispered to the nurse.

She nodded. "Yes. I thought so," she murmured.

As I turned to go back into the main chamber I suddenly grew aware of the change that had taken place around me. When I had entered the boy's cubicle the air had been rent by wailings, even from the court itself. Now all was silent. Glancing through the small aperture in the wall that served as a window, I was amazed to see that the whole assembled population had congealed into a motionless mass. The quiet was almost ominous and made the low murmurings of the suffering boy, which came clearly through the bead curtains, sound all the more terrible.

In quick phrases the nurse explained to the parents that the boy was seriously ill, but that the case was not hopeless and that if I operated at once the probabilities of recovery were very high. Naturally one would have expected a statement of that kind to have been received with satisfaction, if not pleasure. It was rather more than surprising, therefore, when I saw that the nurse's statement appeared to involve her in an argument that grew more and more heated. The nurse remained quiet, dignified, and obviously firm, though, of course, I could not

understand a word she said. But there was neither dignity nor coolness on the part of those who, if royal rank means anything, should have shown those qualities. The queen, her consort, and more and more of the attendant courtiers grew louder and louder in their speech, until it seemed to me that babel had been let loose and that the whole court had broken into a war dance.

This was intolerable. It was true that the boy's condition was not hopeless, even allowing for the fact that there was no proper operating theatre at hand. But every minute wasted meant an increase in the risk. I determined to intervene.

"Nurse!" I cried.

I might just as well have remained silent. Though I spoke loudly, my voice was completely lost in the pandemonium around me.

My quick temper flared up. I was not going to be ignored like this by a mob of gibbering natives.

"Nurse!" I shrieked, at the very top of my voice.

The effect was startling. It was as though everyone had been stunned into silence by the force of my shout, and all eyes were directed towards me with an air of submission.

"What's all this?" I demanded fiercely. "Every minute lost means danger."

"I'm sorry, doctor," replied the nurse, with a worried look. "It's all a matter of etiquette. They are trying to insist that before you operate you must have a banquet with them." She shot a quick glance at me. "Their banquets go on all night," she added significantly.

"It's utterly impossible," I said.

I held up my hand and stepped forward before the queen so that all could see me. Then, slowly and with all the dignity I could command, I shook my head, at the same time pushing both my hands out in what I hoped would look like a gesture of contemptuous dismissal of their ideas. Then, turning to the nurse and the two airline men, I told them to follow me.

In a deathly silence, I marched into the cubicle and looked down at the boy. There was not a moment to lose. Even in those few minutes of absurd argument outside his condition had deteriorated.

There is no need to go into lengthy details of the operation.

In the hospital theatre the removal of an appendix is today a simple operation as a rule, a routine affair that demands no special attention. But here it was different. I had to operate where I was and contrive makeshifts for practically everything the surgeon takes for granted in an ordinary theatre.

Now I was glad indeed that the two flying men had accompanied me, for they would have to act as anæsthetist and assistant between them—tasks for which they expressed their perfect readiness. The captain I delegated to the duty of administering the anæsthetic, which was provided from the chloroform bottle I habitually carry in my case. Before we began I gave him detailed instructions, and from time to time during the course of the operation I had to give him additional instructions—all of which added to the strain of the proceedings. The nurse, of course, was better qualified to assist me, and she was kept busy providing me with boiling water for sterilising the instruments and with a multitude of small jobs. She was amazingly efficient, and every moment my admiration for her mounted.

At first there seemed no work for the radio operator to perform, but I needed him to keep an eye on the patient's pulse. He jumped at the idea, though he took my instructions to keep me informed of its rate a little too literally—though it was a good fault and better than over-confidence in his own judgment. He counted aloud and gave me the figure so often that, harassed though I was, I could not help thinking of the old night watchman who called the time throughout the night and added that all was well.

And, as it turned out, all was well. Surgery is much the same, apart from superficial details, whether one does it in the most modern theatre or in the primitive environment of a native ruler's hut. The only difference, at any rate so far as this operation was concerned, is a subjective one. It seemed to me that it would never be finished, but when, at last, it was over, and I glanced at my watch, I found that it had taken a surprisingly short time, taking all things into consideration. Indeed, the whole affair had occupied not so very much more time than the operation would have taken in a proper hospital.

Now we had done all we could. The life of the boy lay no longer in my hands but in those of fate. Much would depend,

of course, upon the attention the patient received from the nurse, but already I had seen enough of her to realise that there need be no doubts of her capabilities and conscientiousness.

Silently, we moved away from the bed. I did not go at once into the main apartment, for I wished to recover before I faced again that mysterious gathering. The native mind and native customs were a closed book to me, and I did not know what sort of reception I was likely to get this time, especially after I had so peremptorily turned down their offer of a banquet.

So, in the course of a short whispered conversation, I learnt a little more about the nurse. She told me she had been trained at a hospital in Singapore and later at one of the American colleges and had taken up the post of district nurse among the group of islands from which she came. In England the phrase "district nurse" conjures up visions of a devoted woman who takes care of the health of a small village community, but in the Pacific that word "district" means something much more extensive. There were probably a hundred or more villages, dotted about half as many islands, in the area served by this hard-working girl, and to their total population running into thousands she acted not only as nurse and midwife but, in most instances, as doctor as well. Yet, if she knew her capabilities, she was aware also of her limitations, and she was fully alive to the fact that operative surgery was beyond her powers. So it was that she had sent out the SOS. She admitted that she had not expected so prompt a response.

Thinking that the queen and her court were by now probably growing a little anxious at our long absence, we moved into the main apartment.

The spectacle that met our eyes was certainly not that which I, at any rate, expected to see. I had imagined eager questions, an anxious inquiry from the queen whether she could visit her son—all the usual reactions, in fact, of relatives and friends deeply interested in the welfare of the patient.

There were no questions—not then. The people were not to be denied their ceremonial feast, and while I had been battling for the boy's life they had occupied themselves in preparing for the banquet. Perhaps this is one of the rare occasions on which that grandiose word is not misused, for never before had I seen

anything so lavish ; and every experience that followed deepened that impression.

The feast that had been set out stretched right across the floor of the hut—and out through the doorway for a distance I was unable to see. Ranged alongside the food were the people, silently waiting, and the place was crammed, except for vacant places on either hand of the queen and her consort.

As soon as we appeared the queen rose and prostrated herself before me and at the same time every one of that great throng came to his feet and waited for us to take our places. There was something very significant and affecting in this simple act of courtesy, and it impressed me profoundly—far more, I think, than any elaborate display of formality and ritual would have done. My companions and I bowed slightly. It was the sealing of a pact of mutual esteem : they respected us and we returned their respect.

Then at a sign from the queen, everyone sat down—and immediately bedlam broke loose. None but men took their places at the feast. The womenfolk were massed behind them, ministering to their needs and ours. And while we fed, dancers appeared as if from nowhere to entertain us to the accompaniment of wild cries and the steady rhythm of beating hands.

It was a wild and memorable night. My companions and I made no attempt to keep pace with the gargantuan appetites of our hosts, who seemed to have unlimited capacity for foods of all kinds. We were, let me admit, a little dubious about some of the dishes pressed upon us and confined ourselves as far as possible to fruit ; but even so we had more forced down our throats than I have ever eaten before. And there was no end to it. Only when dawn came did the revelry gradually cease, when dancers and diners were utterly worn out and gorged and incapable of continuing further their yells, leaps, and refreshment.

At one stage in the proceedings a huge earthenware bowl was passed round. This was a ceremony of the loving-cup kind, which seems truly universal, and we could hardly refuse to drink of the muddy, thick liquid it contained. It was as well we sipped delicately, for the taste was horrible, and, as we discovered, the after effects were potent. It is a wonder to me that the natives could consume so much and still remain conscious. But every

race and nation has a natural resistance to its chosen drug, whether it be the Scotsman's whisky or the Chinaman's opium.

I stayed in the island for most of the next day, so that I could keep an eye on my patient. I was in some anxiety to make sure that the saturnalia of the night had not had any bad effects on him, for the clamour was hardly the right thing for a patient who needed rest and complete quiet. But he seemed to have suffered no ill-effects, and I had no hesitation in pronouncing him out of danger and leaving him in the hands of the extremely capable nurse who promised that, unless there was a really urgent call from elsewhere, she would not leave the island until she was satisfied that the boy was fully recovered.

And now follows the leave-taking. It was on a scale only less stupendous than the banquet of the night. A cargo ship of sizeable tonnage would have been required if we had desired to take away with us all the gifts that were showered on us, for in saving the boy's life we had rendered a service to every member of the community, and each had to signify his thanks with a present.

There were coconuts and mangoes, peaches and rare fruits, together with curious and esoteric foods that I had never seen before. The queen's consort had, of course, to offer more than anyone, and he tried to press upon us as part of his gift a number of native women, young and attractive, sufficient to form the basis of a quite elaborate harem. But all we declined with thanks and expressions of goodwill and courtesy. We pointed to our small launch and shook our heads. The natives laughed. Their laughter is always quick in coming and they seemed to regard the comparison between the size of the boat and their heaped-up gifts as the greatest joke of the season.

We made several attempts to embark, but each was frustrated by the appearance of some new gift; we eventually, however, turned determinedly to go. The captain and the radio operator got abroad in safety, and I was about to follow them when, courteously, the queen and her consort drew me aside. With them was a native who spoke English of a sort, and he put before me the latest royal offer. It was that I should remain in the island so that "I could cut the people without pain." The anæsthetic had, it appeared, made a deep impression on them, since causing pain to anyone other than an enemy is regarded with disfavour

in the islands—as I was to find elsewhere. Handsome bribes backed up this proposal: I was to have plenty shark, plenty copra—above all, plenty wives. I shook my head. The island, I thought, was hardly a place where I could build up a successful practice.

So I was allowed at last to go, and a few minutes later the launch was thrusting its way through the calm sea for Suva.

It was an experience on which I reflected with a great deal of pleasure, something else which serves to brighten those moments of boredom when the ordered routine of civilised life seems almost unendurable. I had vowed to myself then that, if opportunity offered, I would again visit Tonga-Tonga to see how long native memories are. Besides, I always like to follow my cases to their completion, and to this day I do not know what finally happened to the boy—though I have little doubt in my own mind that he is among the fittest men on the island.

But something happened the other day which has weakened that resolution, and it forms a fitting postscript for this chapter. I was talking to a friend in my club—a man who knows these islands well and is always interested to hear of people's experiences among them.

He listened with many knowing chuckles to my story until I came to the incident of the loving cup. Then he looked up sharply with a horrified question in his eyes.

"D'you mean to say you drank the stuff?" he demanded incredulously.

"Of course," I replied. "What else could I do? There were plenty of spears about, and I didn't want to risk a slit throat by insulting them."

He shook his head. "D'you know what it is and how they make it?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"Then listen," he returned. "This drink is made from a special plant the roots of which are dried. The women sit round a large bowl, chew the dried roots, and spit them into the bowl. Then they soften the contents, add water, and leave it to stand for a few weeks. You can see what happens. It's the saliva that acts as the ferment for the roots. The result you know—you drank it."

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If I had not been sick after drinking this concoction I felt a trifle ill then. Certainly this was a case in which ignorance had been safety, though not perhaps bliss. For in spite of what my friend said and his plain disapproval of my having accepted the loving-cup, I am still wondering what would have happened to me if I had refused to partake of it.

No, I do not think I shall visit Tonga-Tonga again. It shall remain for me a stimulating memory to which I can turn when life is dull. And perhaps, after all, my friend exaggerated a little—though when I recall that drink I have the uneasy conviction that he was in dead earnest.

CHAPTER VI

Suva, Sharks and Surgery

My decision to remain for a little while in Suva was based on two desires ; one was to see more of Fiji itself and its customs, the other to visit some of the notable adjoining islands, among them Calendar and Easter Islands, without trips to which one may scarcely claim to have seen the sights of the Pacific ocean. There was, of course, the possible problem of accommodation to be settled, for I had made no reservations for the simple reason that I was not travelling to a timetable. But there was scarcely likelihood of the same difficulties in the capital of the Fiji Islands as I had found in the capital of the United States.

As a matter of fact there was no difficulty at all. I asked the advice of the invariably helpful and courteous American airline people, and they immediately offered me accommodation in their own compound. This could not have been better, the more so as I was told I could stay for as long or as short a period as I felt inclined. This is what I like to do in travelling—to remain for as long as takes my fancy and to move on when the mood takes me. There is nothing I hate more than the type of journey which says, “here, so long ; there, so long.” That is all right for business purposes but not for pleasure. Indeed, when I travel for professional reasons I cannot tolerate delays of any kind and would rather endure discomfort if by so doing I can cut an hour or so off the time occupied.

I felt no regrets when I waved goodbye to the flying boat, the captain and radio-operator of which had shared with me that interesting experience in Tonga-Tonga and more than that had proved invaluable allies in a moment of crisis. No, I did not even feel a pang of sorrow that I had not so much as passed the time of day with the auburn-haired lady who had shared the outward journey with me. After all, in London,

New York, Paris—any one of the great cities of the world one meets good looking young women every day, and many of them, in these days of skilful colour chemistry, are auburn-haired. But one gets to Suva perhaps once in a lifetime.

Suva is notable among the towns of the Pacific islands in that it possesses a University. No one could remain ignorant of the fact, for the institution occupied by far the largest and most imposing building in the capital. It towers above all else, and there is no need to ask one's way to it, for it is the principal urban landmark. Yet these things are relative. In the perspective of the town, the University building appears huge and overwhelming; but actually I think it is the smallest foundation of its kind bearing that honoured title I have ever seen.

It was early in the morning of the day following my return to Suva that I decided to visit the University. Arming myself with a few credentials, principally of American origin, for I knew that such counted for more in these islands than the highest Britain can supply, I strolled towards the building. There seemed to be no janitor from whom I could seek information; the only person in view was a young, intelligent-looking native in a white duck suit, who was about to enter the building.

Without much hope I approached him. I had not yet accustomed myself to the fact that a native variant of American-English is a *lingua-franca* of the Islands, and I was filled with schoolboy beliefs, based on juvenile reading, of life in the Pacific fifty or more years before, that when one wished to speak to a native one used signs.

For simple needs, no doubt a sign language can be made intelligible, but my wishes could hardly be directly conveyed. I wanted to see the Director of the Faculty of Medicine, as he was named in the papers supplied to me by the Washington authorities; and how does one symbolise such a person by signs? However, I did my best, trying to indicate at any rate that I wished to see someone, and my gesticulations were large and handsome.

The young man stared at me in astonishment, and then a slow, attractive smile crossed his face.

"And what the heck do ya think you're doing?" he asked

with an accent that would have attracted no attention at all in New York.

It was one of the few occasions on which I have felt considerably embarrassed and confused. I muttered an apology though I don't think he heard it—and explained my business. Immediately he took me in charge.

"You'd better come along with me," he said. "I guess you didn't figure on hearing English here, 'cept from a white man. It's one of the first things we have to learn, and we can't make the grade without it."

I fell into step beside him, and he became most informative. The University, he told me, was a comparatively recent foundation and owed its inception to the Rockefeller Foundation, as so many admirable institutions do.

There was no doubt about its success. Under American influence, the younger and more progressive natives had acquired a thirst for knowledge of all kinds and wished to learn all the west had to teach them—though without any desire to become westernised in the worst sense. So it was that there was keen competition for entry to one or other of the three departments, which consisted of General Science, the Arts and Medicine. No one, he explained with a sly grin, was allowed to study medicine, for example, unless he had proficiency in the English language. I felt myself growing a little pink again.

The University diploma was awarded after successful completion of a four years' course, after which the newly fledged doctors started practice in one or more of the islands.

At the time, I was inclined to discount his glowing reports of the work done by these native doctors among their own people, feeling inclined to make allowances for the enthusiasm of youth. But after experience and information proved to me that, if anything, he had understated the case rather than exaggerated it. The good work these men do is beyond all praise. Always short of proper equipment, and with the supply of drugs and medicines always unreliable, they achieve wonders under conditions which, as a general rule, would appal any doctor in Great Britain or the United States. I had already experienced something of those conditions, but I had imagined they were probably exceptional. Now I found that they were more like

the normal day's work for these native practitioners, who obtained their real knowledge of medicine, as all doctors do, in the hard school of experience—though theirs is a harder school than most.

Naturally I was most interested in what he had to say about surgical work on the islands. These men do not, as a rule, attempt anything in the way of a major operation—which is why none of them had answered the SOS which had reached the flying-boat. Theirs was mainly surgery of the first-aid order—the treatment of fractures and lacerations. Nor was it only lack of skill and equipment which made them shy of surgery; there are many local customs and beliefs which render it not only difficult but sometimes hazardous.

He opened his eyes and smiled dubiously when I told him of what I had done on Tonga-Tonga.

"Yep," he said. "The SOS was picked up right here, but I guess none of us would have stood in on it for a million dollars."

"But why?" I asked. "There must be someone here who can do an appendix."

"Sure," he replied. "It'd be chick feed to our prof. Too risky."

I pressed him for details, wondering what hazard I had avoided in my ignorance. He told me. There was a risk that the patient might die, and if he had taken leave of the world it would have demanded retaliation. One of the more fanatical of the natives would almost certainly have tried to assassinate me.

"I guess the islands look pretty peaceful places to you," he said, "but life's just one of the cheapest commodities round here. Folk just die and there's no D.A. to start getting awkward."

It was impossible not to be impressed by his seriousness. He gave me a glimpse of a world in which such things as flying-boats were mere superficialities. Nor could I doubt his sincerity when he warned me that if I had the slightest doubt as to the boy's recovery, I had better keep within the airway compound while I stayed in Suva.

"News gets across in no time," he explained. "Radio hasn't a thing on it around here, and if that kid's got curtains it'll be just too bad for you."



DUTCH EAST INDIES. Bali dancer.



JAVA. Borobodor. Bas reliefs on terrace.

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where the same performance was gone through against a different background. By the time late afternoon came and the tour was finally completed, I was feeling truly exhausted.

It was then that I made a most foolish mistake. He had given his whole day and tried to do everything possible to make my visit memorable to me (though perhaps my memories are not quite the ones he intended), and I felt that some recognition of the attentions he had paid me was necessary.

I had, in fact, come prepared to make such a gesture and had with me a small case of instruments which I had purchased in America. The Dean was delighted when I showed it to him, marvelling at its compactness and the fine quality of the instruments themselves. When I told him that it was for him, as a slight memento of my visit, his eyes nearly popped out of his head. He was like a child presented at last with a much longed-for toy.

But if I had hoped to escape during his raptures, I was grievously mistaken. All the efforts I had so strenuously made to lead up to a leave-taking were frustrated. Instantly he insisted on my coming with him while he took the case round the University and demonstrated it to all his colleagues. Then he led them all back to his room and, seriously and formally, asked me to confer upon them the honour of accepting the chair of surgery.

He was paying me, I do not doubt, the highest compliment he could have proffered any man, but, at the same time, I do not think he was unduly surprised, when, in language which I hoped matched the formality of the offer and did not let down the elaborate courtesy of the whole proceedings, I refused. He looked a little sad, but his short nod of the head betrayed that he had had no hope of my acceptance.

It was late evening now, and at last I was released to return to the compound, where I discovered that my long solitary absence had led to a certain amount of anxiety. Apparently, that young student was not the only one who feared I might stand in some danger as the result of my adventures in Tonga-Tonga. The official in charge of the station had spent many years in the islands, and he treated native customs with the respect they deserved.

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"Believe me, doc.," he said impressively, "if that kid should die, I'd rather be me than you."

"He won't," I replied shortly, feeling thoroughly tired of the whole buusiness.

"O.K.," said the airline man, nodding sagely. I think he was making some disparaging mental comment on the superior ways of those who were new to Pacific culture.

It was a relief to find myself among the party of Americans who were staying in the airways premises at the same time as I. Though I had come in search of native life in the raw, so to speak, I was glad to be back among civilised people for a little while. It had been a tiring and boring day for me—and, as I did not propose to remain long, it was a day wasted. True, I had wanted to see the University—but I had never intended to spend a whole day there.

In this mood of reaction I jumped at the offer made to me to join the Americans the next day in watching native boys diving for pearls and afterwards indulging in their national sport of shark-killing. The latter was something I specially wished to see—not that I am an admirer of blood-sports, but because the descriptions I have read of it have always fascinated me. So, too, in but a lesser degree, have the accounts of pearl-fishing which have come my way. The chance of witnessing these things among company who would not expect me to observe the local code of manners and customs was a golden opportunity not to be missed.

Next morning, as we made our way to the beach, one of the Americans, who had spent a good deal of time in visiting the islands, told me of the remarkable endurance of these native pearl-divers. Without the aid of any sort of apparatus they can remain below water for as long as three to five minutes at a time. So far as I know, a feat of this kind has never been performed, even as a "record," by any civilised man. Powers of this kind never fail to remind me again, and with a fresh sense of wonder, of the amazing versatility of the human system, which seems able to adapt itself to practically any kind of physical condition. But that ability, I suppose, is the secret of man's rise from the original scimian stock and of his long survival in all parts of the world.

On the beach we embarked in a native craft and set sail for a bay a few miles further round the coast of the island. It seemed to me that with so light a breeze we should not reach our destination till nightfall, but I had reckoned without the extraordinary skill of these native yachtsmen. They are masters of the seas. Anthropologists have a theory (or something stronger than a theory) that the original Polynesian stock crossed vast stretches of the Pacific in their apparently crude vessels. When one reads such statements, they seem incredible, yet when one has sailed with these people, one is prepared to believe it without argument.

Certainly they made use of every slight puff of wind on that day, which was almost flat calm, and we reached the bay in a surprisingly short time. Then the boys got ready for their diving, and I waited with keen anticipation of seeing at last something I had always wanted to see.

Let me say at once that I found it quite disappointing. Nor was this feeling to be ascribed to that curious reaction which so often comes of at last realising a long cherished dream. It is a remarkable performance, of course, testifying to the high skill and fitness of these natives, but it is very unspectacular and unsatisfying to watch.

The men stand on rafts inhaling a vast quantity of air—so much, in fact, that it is difficult to understand how it is all stored in the lungs. Then they dive—and in three to five minutes, they return to the surface bearing a dirty-looking object, which they hold high above their heads.

Perhaps the most memorable feature of this demonstration was the huge grins which accompanied every movement of the native experts. They had a smile for everything and everyone—and they reserved their largest and most expansive grins for the two girls who formed part of our group of five. Young men, it seems, are the same the world over—and perhaps old ones as well.

Sharks, of course, infest these waters, though on that occasion we did not catch a glimpse of one. Each diver carries with him a long dagger supported by a girdle, which he is ready to use at an instant's notice. It is an inviolable law among the divers that one man always remains on the raft while diving is going on.

He keeps a keen look-out for sharks, and if one approaches he immediately dives in to do battle with the intruder. He knows the risks involved yet he faces them calmly as part of the day's work. And it is rarely that the shark survives. If it does, then there is one native less in Fiji, for in these contests there are no victories on points, and the stake is one life or the other.

When we had declared ourselves satisfied with the demonstration, we set sail again and returned to the compound for lunch. We paid scant attention to the meal—it deserved much more attention than it got—for all of us were greatly excited at the prospect of the afternoon's shark-killing. The meal over, we lost no time in running down to the beach, where the same ketch was waiting for us. This time we sailed in the opposite direction, and we must have travelled half way round the island before sail was slackened and the scene of operations was reached.

For half an hour or more we lay off the shore at a distance of about a hundred yards while the natives seemed to be taking their bearings. Then we began to move further inshore at a pace that was barely perceptible. Sharks must be approached with the greatest care else they will obtain warning of the approach and swim away. Moreover, as in stalking, the approach has to be made up wind, for a shark is reputed to be able to smell a human being at a distance of upwards of a mile. Its small, pinpoint eyes are virtually useless, but its nose, like that of many fishes, is very keen.

This stretch of the coast was one of the principal centres of the native sport. It is honeycombed with caves, nooks and grottoes, the feature of which is the smallness of their openings compared with the space within. This is the sort of thing the shark likes for its leisure moments. It can squeeze its way through the bottleneck and then lie sleeping or resting near the surface, safe from its natural enemies.

But it is not safe from the attacks of man, who carries the war right into his quarry's territory.

I doubt if there can be any sport more testing or dangerous than that of shark-killing as practised here, especially when it is remembered that the native hunters are in an element which is not their own. To the observer the odds seem heavily on

the shark—yet taken all round it is a comparative rarity for one of the boys to fail.

The hunters swim to the caves, making as little noise and splash as possible, so as not to disturb the resting fish. Most of the time they swim below water—a tribute again to their remarkable endurance—and they attack from below. At the right moment, when fully underneath the shark, they take the knife from between their teeth and then, with a single stroke, slash the entire length of the ventral aspect. At the same moment they dive deeply, so as to be out of the way of the violent threshing of the wounded fish, for one blow from its flailing tail is sufficient to kill a man.

Very often the hunter has to make a blind approach. He does not know whether the cave is occupied or not—and if he finds it empty he is in a perilous position from which he seeks to escape at once. If a shark enters, blocking the entrance while the man is there, the odds are very long on the shark.

But even when the entrance is blocked the native does not consider himself beaten. He calls to his aid that patience which is a virtue in all hunters, whether they be men for sport or beasts for food. He waits until he judges the shark to be asleep, or at any rate somnolent, and then follows something which to me is hair-raising simply in description, let alone in reality. Diving slowly beneath the fish he places his hands on the monster's belly, and, with a gentle massaging movement, slides it into the broader expanses of the cave. He dare not stab the fish in the constricted funnel, for that would be certain death to him, with no room to dive clear. And as a general rule it is only sleeping sharks that are attacked; the wakeful one is usually all too ready to put in its blow first.

As we sat in the ketch waiting for developments one of the crew turned quickly and pointed. There was something eloquent and dramatic in the gesture, which was the overture to something more moving and exciting than we had come prepared to see.

Following the pointed finger with our eyes, we saw a native boy in the water swimming as fast as he was able—and that is very fast indeed. And behind him, in hot pursuit, was one of his dreaded enemies—a shark.

This was a situation of which I had often read in tales of Pacific adventure, but I had never expected—or even hoped—to see it in actuality. It was no sport. It was deadly serious—and it had in it the making of a tragedy that was only avoided by a hairbreadth.

So this, I thought to myself, is what the famous triangular fin looks like! There was something evil and menacing about it. It is one of the sights I shall never forget.

In quick, staccato, native-English, the helmsman explained what had probably happened. Two boys had come out for sport—and one had dived leaving the other to keep watch for marauding sharks. The latter, perhaps from a youthful desire to show off, perhaps from sheer neglectfulness, had deserted his post and gone into the water. It was, said the helmsman with an expressive shrug, the sort of thing that happened quite a lot among the younger boys who had not yet learnt sense and acquired responsibility.

The situation as it presented itself to our eyes was bad enough in all conscience. Yet that was only the obvious part of it. Somewhere in one of those caves was another native boy—and there was no one to warn him if danger should approach from another quarter. However, there was nothing we could do about that, and the immediate sight was enough to claim all our breathless attention. The main hope for the boy below was that he might break surface to get air and see the state of affairs for himself.

It was a race to the death in all truth. And there could be no denying that the shark was gaining rapidly on the boy. He was beyond our reach and his one chance of human aid was that his companion might come in time to hunt the hunter. I heard a sharply caught breath beside me. One of the American girls had gone deathly pale—as well she might for it was a dreadful scene, not so much in itself as for its imminent probabilities. I drew her down into the boat so that she could no longer see what was happening.

The whole thing probably occupied no more than a couple of minutes—yet, as all such periods of suspense do, it seemed an eternity. And when the climax came, it came abruptly, unexpectedly and confusedly, so that none of us could say for certain what happened.

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All I saw was a huge splash of water, as though a fountain had suddenly begun to play beneath the sea. There was a dazzling white streak as the shark rolled over and exposed its silvery belly in readiness to strike.

These things stand out with such vividness in my memory that they have all the sharpness of a perfect photograph. Then all became blurred, and—strange though it sounds—vision was obscured by sound. The cry that rose to the heavens was more piercing, more full of ultimate agony, than anything in all my experience. It was such a cry as dulled all the other senses.

But only for a moment. The power of sight was only temporarily blotted out. I can see again, as I write this, the terror-stricken face of the boy as he rose again to the surface and recommenced his frenzied swimming. For a minute or so I believed that a miracle had happened and that the shark had missed its strike. And then the hope faded. His strokes grew weaker and weaker. The injury, whatever it was, must be serious to sap his strength so rapidly.

Now the helmsman saw his chance. He uttered a sharp command to his companion, and the boat was put about rapidly to bear down upon the boy. We were only just in time. As the native at the bow leant over and skilfully caught the sinking man it was clear that he was on the point of going down for the last time.

I will not attempt to describe the terrible sight he presented. One of the girls fainted outright, and even two of the men turned away their heads with a blanched expression of nausea on their faces. It is only a surgeon who can look without shuddering on a limb terribly lacerated and profusely bleeding; and he can do so not because he lacks compassion or is callous but because it is his job—his privilege—to try to heal.

Let me say then only this about this injury, which was certainly one of the most shocking I have ever come across: the left leg had been severed above the knee, and the stump looked as though the damage had been done with a sharp, though very inexpertly wielded, saw. Muscle and bone were ragged, and flaps of flesh and skin hung down. It had, too, been brutally crushed, as well as torn; but this, though it added to the horror of the sight, was actually the cause of the boy's survival; for

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the pressure had twisted and at least partially closed the major arteries and so prevented the boy's bleeding to death.

It was no time for detailed examination. A tourniquet had to be applied at once to make sure that the bleeding was properly arrested. My eye fell on the helmsman's leather belt.

"Give that to me," I said.

He obeyed at once—almost as though he had expected the order. No doubt he had seen events like this before and knew the purpose to which his belt was to be put.

Equally, it appeared, the helmsman knew that the boy must be taken ashore at the earliest possible moment, for even before I had finished applying the tourniquet, he had set full sail and was heading the little boat for home.

In less than an hour we had the boy in the native hospital, where I was lucky to find reasonably good assistance awaiting me. The only thing we could do was to trim the lacerated limb as though we were correcting a badly done amputation. The twin divine gifts of anæsthesia and morphine saved the boy from the excruciating pain he must otherwise have felt.

That operation had a most intent and deeply interested audience—the entire medical faculty and student body of the medical section of the University of Suva. Even the Dean himself was present; and afterwards that worthy man himself explained to me how different the prospect for that boy would have been not so long ago, in the days before his medical school had begun to implant the rudiments of modern surgery in the native mind—though he was careful to add that, of course, no one on the island could have handled the operation in the way I had.

The native method, I gathered, was crude and imposed weeks of agony, assuming that the victim was lucky (or some might say unlucky) enough to survive.

First, the crushed limb was either covered with boiling tar, usually from a tin container, or hot cauterizing irons were applied to the raw flesh—the object in either case being, of course, to seal the blood vessels and prevent infection. Readers of the books of Joseph Conrad, Jack London, and a host of other writers of the sea will find a familiar ring about this description. And when that was done it was largely a matter of letting the natural

healing processes of the body carry on their work. The one certainty about it was the unending weeks of excruciating agony, which only the strongest constitution could survive.

Today, with native doctors trained in the University at hand, the treatment is much more scientific and—still more important—inflicts very little further pain on the patient. And, if the Dean's statement that only five per cent. of the cases are fatal be true, then the state of affairs there and the standard attained are very creditable indeed.

Once again, then, I had gone out sightseeing, bent on nothing more than satisfying my curiosity and deriving what pleasure I could from it, and the expedition had ended in surgery. It had been a tragic business, which, needless to say, had not only marred the afternoon but also completely killed the party's interest in shark-killing—including my own. I had later other opportunities of seeing the sport, but I refused every one. The mere mention of it brings to my mind's eye the sight of that terrified face, looking out of the water in helpless appeal to us, and to my mind's ear that horrible yell of anguish.

I thought it was the end of another not altogether pleasing episode for me. But it was not, for I was practically obliged to witness one more shark-slaying.

The boy's elder brother was one of the most noted and successful shark-killers on the island, and it was no doubt in emulation of this brother's prowess that he—the boy—had rashly decided to enter the water unprotected. And this elder brother swore by all the sacred things of his people that the affair must be avenged. To swear vengeance on a shark may seem strange, while the possibility of recognising one individual shark amongst so many seems stranger still. But this was the custom, and as for recognition, the natives claimed to be able to pick out individual sharks with comparative ease, while they would be helped in this instance by the fact that a shark which has tasted human flesh haunts the scene of its meal in the hope of more.

Next day the same fish was reported to be swimming about in the same vicinity. The invitation for me to accompany the hunter in the native boat was so strongly put that, despite my aversion from it, I accepted, feeling that to refuse would have

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been a deep discourtesy. I looked on the hunter in admiration. He was about twenty-one years old, and his body, naked except for a loincloth, was that of a perfect athlete. It has rarely been my good luck to gaze upon such a magnificent specimen of what a man should be physically. There was not an ounce of superfluous flesh. The muscles moved easily, effortlessly and rhythmically beneath the skin. And as he waited tensely for the appearance of the enemy against which he had sworn a terrible retribution, his expression was one of utter concentration. No sign of fear or anxiety appeared in his face, which was calm and confident.

For ten minutes we waited and then we all espied the shark simultaneously. The hunter stood up, poised, like a statue; and it seemed to me as though he was praying for strength to his protecting spirits. Then, putting the long knife between his teeth, he dived. He was more like a fish than a man. There was barely a splash as he broke the surface, and he moved through the water as though it was his natural element. Something of his sinewy grace reminded me of an otter.

The fight was on. This was no slitting the stomach of a sleeping shark, but a duel in the open in which both adversaries were fully alive to each other's presence. To me, watching, it seemed an almost hopeless task, for the shark appeared so much the more powerful.

But, as most people know, the shark's mouth is so overhung that it must turn on its back to bite with its powerful jaws, and it is this which gives man, so much the weaker, so much less master of the water, his chance. Time and again the brute turned, but the hunter eluded him. The impression was of two wrestlers working for an opening. Again and again the hunter dived to get below the fish; and as often the shark was too quick for him.

The end came at last. Subtlety and brain won against sheer brute strength and efficiency. Through the clear water I could see a swift, almost lightning, movement of the hunter's right hand—and the white belly was slit from end to end. There was a terrific uproar. Water was thrown high into the air in great fountains. The body of the shark twisting and turning span like some aquatic Catherine wheel. A sudden silence fell. The

shark, its death tremors over, began to drift away with the current ; and the hunter, treading water, watched it go.

Shark oil is one of the most valuable of products in the islands, but none of the natives will take it from the body of a fish slain in this way for vengeance. They say that it is impure. More than that, in the complicated system of native superstition, oil from a shark that had killed or injured a friend would bring about the darkest bad luck.

After that heroic combat I saw no more of the hunter till the day I left Suva. Then, as the launch taking me to the flying-boat was crossing the harbour, a native in a small boat suddenly stood up, waved violently, and grinned so that his face was in danger of splitting, like a Cheshire cat's.

"Me—shark-killer," he yelled. "Me kill many more when you come back to Suva."

I do not doubt that he will. I doubt very much whether any shark could outwit this nerveless being whose muscles are steel and whose brain is ice. But whether I shall ever again witness his prowess, I do not know. Somehow I do not think I will, even if I go back to Suva. If I think of the dead shark floating away from him, I think more of that cry and of the mangled body we pulled from the sea in the nick of time.

CHAPTER VII

Strange Interludes

Although there was little more that I wished to see in Fiji, I prolonged my stay there because, by making use of the regular trans-Pacific air services, it is a convenient base for exploring some of the other islands which I wished to visit. I do not claim that I had by any means exhausted the possibilities of Fiji as a source either of entertainment or of education, but, in spite of the fact that I was travelling without a timetable, I could not leave my London practice for too long and there had to be a limit to the period I could spend abroad. I preferred to make this first trip to the Pacific as comprehensive as possible to give me a bird's eye view of the islands so that if ever I returned again I could know where to go for a more extended stay.

Someone—I forget now who it was—suggested I should visit Calendar Island, and accordingly I took the first flying-boat going there. This gave me my first experience of how hot it can be in the Pacific Islands. The places I had so far called at had been hot, but they seemed mild and temperate in comparison with Calendar Island. My two chief memories of the place are indeed of the extreme heat, which reminded me of a steelworks I once visited, and of American soldiers, bored, dispirited and a little resentful both of their lot and of sightseeing tourists such as myself.

Calendar Island is a very lonely outpost of what might be called, for want of a better term (though I am aware most Americans would indignantly deny it), the American Empire in the Pacific. It was occupied by the Japanese and subsequently reoccupied by the Americans. There the troops have remained ever since, and it is very easy indeed to see their argument that their presence on the island is pointless and that their journey back to the United States in the speediest possible way is really

necessary. But it is not so easy for the outsider to obtain any clear view of strategical needs in an area so vast as the Pacific Ocean ; and that this is so was proved by the talk of these American soldiers, who scarcely seemed able to understand at all what had happened in the Pacific during the war.

That was a point of view I was to encounter time and again in my travels. The individual soldier rarely knows what is happening outside his own particular little bit of the line—and under the conditions of modern warfare even that does not appear very clear or straightforward. And the Pacific campaign can only be followed with any hope of understanding by the aid of great maps or, better still, through the medium of the documentary cinema. I have learnt more about operations in the war against Japan while sitting comfortably in a London picture theatre than I did in all my journeys to the actual places concerned in the conflict. Indeed, I think I can say that one does not begin to realise what long distances are until one goes to the southern hemisphere. One needs to alter one's whole scale of perspective, and to think of hundreds of miles instead of single miles as very short distances. I can say that even though, as a youth, I grew up amid the vast stretches of the Russian countryside, to one cradled in England the scale must, at first, seem overwhelming and bewildering.

But whether there be strategical reasons or not for the presence of these American troops on Calendar Island, they cannot be there as an occupational police force to administer a conquered people. In all the Pacific islands I visited I never saw natives so wretched or lacking in spirit as these islanders. The Polynesian peoples are, when fit and happy, fine races of men—some of them, like the shark slayer who took vengeance for his brother, being outstanding specimens of humanity in physical attributes. On the other hand, there is nothing so miserable looking or mean than one of the degenerate peoples. They seem to lose everything—even the will to live ; and a cold judgment would probably say that they deserve the extinction which is surely coming to them.

These people, then, appeared to have little culture, or even as much as the interest in life which leads to the growth of primitive culture. At first sight, one might dismiss them as among

the dregs of humanity and take no further interest in them. For all that, however, they have aroused a great deal of speculation among anthropologists and ethnologists, by whom these people are held to be the last surviving remnants of a race that was once powerful and great and possessed a fairly high degree of culture.

The evidence for this is held to be the existence of carved monuments on the island. Certainly these show a degree of skill and an artistic genius which would be quite unthinkable among the people still living on the island. A creationist, looking for evidence to refute the evolutionary theory, might well point to the contrast between these carvings and the present inhabitants of Calendar as further evidence of the fall of man ever downwards from a once high ideal condition.

And though in everyday affairs these people do not strike one as either intelligent or even lively, there are moments when they recapture something of what may have been their past glories. Their methods of gaining a livelihood are primitive; they have none of the skill as fishermen or agriculturists one sees among most people in the South Seas. But I had one glimpse of the other side of their character which was, I think, more impressive than anything of its kind I witnessed elsewhere.

The day after I arrived there was to be a great festival in honour of the liberation of the island and the defeat of Japan. When I was told this I could not help thinking that this celebration seemed a little late in the day; and I also wondered why it was that these downcast people should find the events of sufficient interest to celebrate. I could not imagine that they would show any particular reaction towards whoever might come and take possession of their little country.

The American officer to whom I put these points smiled rather grimly.

"Maybe they like celebrating," he said. "Puts a kick on life—and boy, does one need that in this dump! This isn't the first, you know. They've been keeping it up ever since the news was flashed across."

That may have been true. The officer must have known much more about the Calendar Islanders than I did or was ever likely

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to. But I could not suppress the speculation that perhaps their enthusiasm was artificially stimulated by the forces of occupation as some sort of a relief from boredom. For, if the islanders themselves are hangdogs, I have never seen any men, white or coloured, so utterly bored and "browed off" as those American troops. If they stayed there much longer, I thought, they might soon get into the same wretched state as the natives themselves. The terrific heat, of course, may have quite a lot to do with this human deterioration, and if it has had that effect on the natives, it is more than likely to have much more noticeable results on the white man. It is, of course, an old belief that the climate of the South Seas leads to degeneracy in the white man and that it is also responsible for the general casualness of the native character—though I think a statistical investigation would hardly support its truth. Nevertheless, if it be so, then in Calendar the conditions are such as to produce the disease in a very acute form.

I did not look forward to the festival with any special enthusiasm, for I expected it to be of much the same kind as the banquet at which I had been the guest of honour. It came, therefore, as a surprise to me.

This was something much less primitive. It was not a mere orgy of eating and drinking, with dances of a rather crude kind as an incidental. Here, the dance was the thing—and it was profoundly impressive, having many of the qualities of the modern ballet at its best. Indeed, there were moments when I was reminded of the ardour and clamour of the dances from *Prince Igor*, though there was, of course, no actual resemblance in form.

There can be no doubt, I think, that these dances were ritual ones, as most native dances are. But the people have deteriorated so much that barely a trace of the tradition they ritualise had remained. Though I asked questions, no satisfactory answers were forthcoming. It seems as though the dances, like the monuments, are mere relics of a greater age.

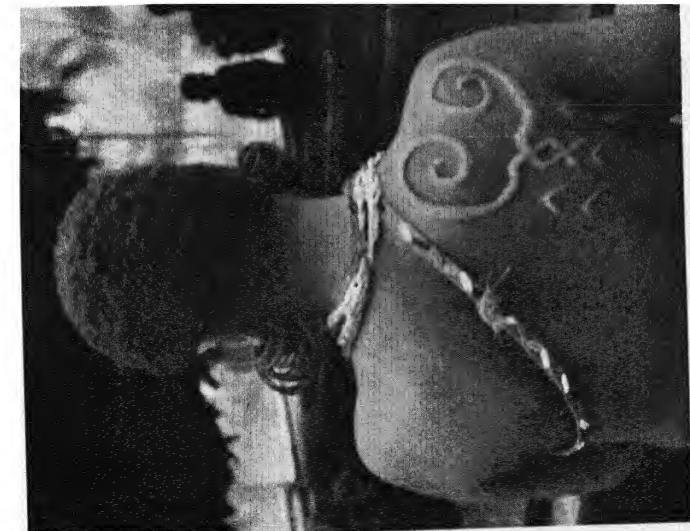
In only one feature did this celebration—one of the most striking V-festivals that I witnessed—resemble the banquet in Tonga-Tonga. That was in its length. It went on all night, the flames of the bonfires leaping ever higher and the dancers

growing more and more frenzied as the night wore on, so that one wondered what secret stores of physical energy they drew upon and began to feel exhausted on their behalf. As a matter of fact, I did not stay to see the end—few of the white people present did so, except those who remained to see that law and order were preserved. After a time the pattern of the dance seemed to repeat itself, and one had the feeling that to stay would be like seeing a film programme all through again.

It was an exhilarating exhibition in its way. Yet to me the most interesting point was—and is—the origin of these dances. The people became transformed during them. All their lassitude and lack of purpose vanished magically under the influence of these complicated rhythms of sound and pattern. I felt how wonderful it would be if we could have revived the past and witnessed these rituals in all their pristine splendour. But that could not be. In no place in the world is the past more dead than in Calendar Island.

One of the places every visitor to the Pacific wishes to see, myself among them, is Easter Island, and the sight of the monuments on Calendar Island brought back all my old ambitions. Inquiries showed that a plane was due to call at Calendar and leave for Easter Island the next day, and accordingly I made arrangements to travel by it. But first I had to attend a farewell dinner with the officers of the American garrison who had given me their hospitality during the whole of my stay. It was a gay affair, which ended with the accustomed wishes that they would see me again. But this time it was not an invitation to return to that island. Their wishes showed in their words: Call on us when next you visit the States, they said; we'd like to talk to you in civilised surroundings.

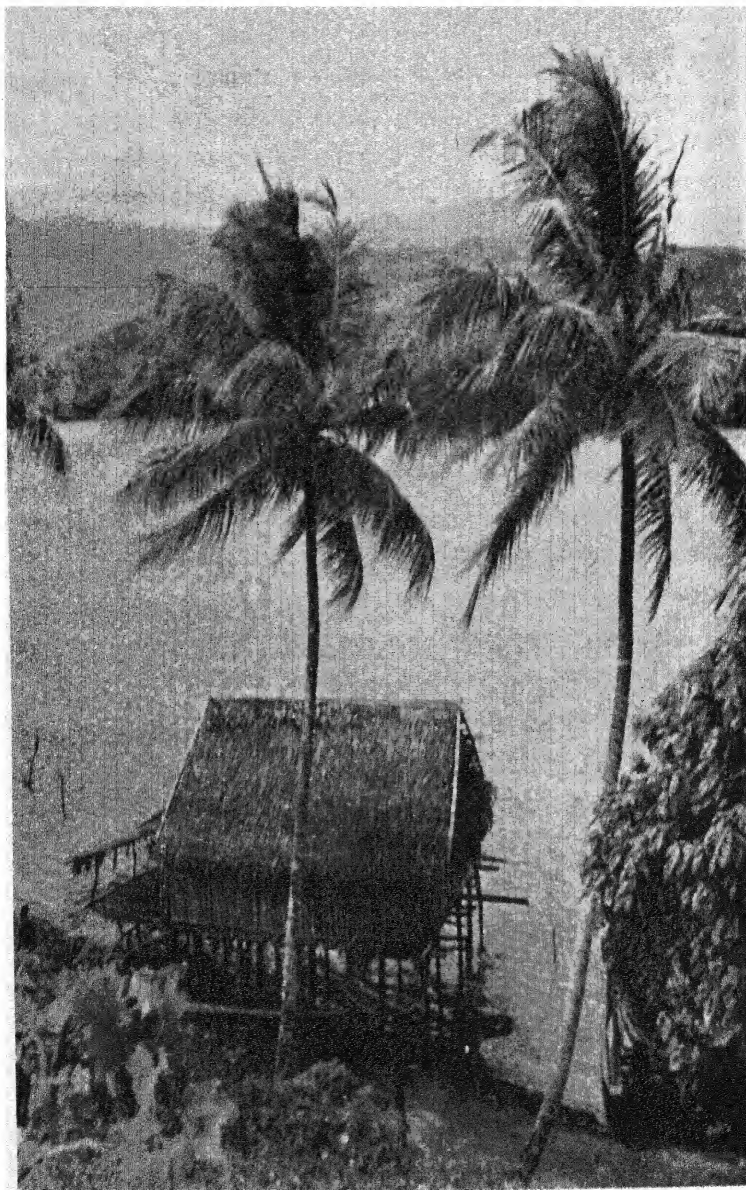
There were no medical adventures or calls on Calendar Island. I neither wanted them nor expected them; it was hardly likely that there would be any need for my attentions in a place on which the American Army Medical Service had one of its own efficient surgeons. The doctor was in some ways one of the most remarkable commentaries on the enervating qualities of the island. He was young, but his obvious keenness and enthusiasm had almost disappeared under a mask of boredom and an I-don't-care expression. Only occasionally did his real self



NEW GUINEA. Tattooing on girl's back. At an early age, wood ash and earth are rubbed into open cuts to form permanent weals.



FIJI. Native boy wearing blue and red headpiece to signify that he is unmarried. Facial scars are tribal marks.



DUTCH NEW GUINEA. Native hut, built in the water for protection.

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peep out, as when his eyes lighted up on talk of American hospitals and new trends in medicine. And then the boredom descended again.

"Well, I guess I'll be just too out-of-date to practise by the time I get back home in the States," he remarked—and changed the subject. Calendar Island is one of the lost islands of the Pacific, but it offers none of the compensations of forgetfulness. There is something about it which suggests all the time to those stationed on it that they are exiles and that the way home is long and arduous. Even the natives seem to be mourning their lost and unknown past.

Luckily I had no time to catch the pervading influence. I had seen one more little place in the Pacific, and I could now move on to something new. It was sad to think, however, as the flying-boat took off the next day, that I was leaving behind me men who never had any wish to go there and certainly had no wish to stay there. To be an exile from one's country is one thing—I know the feeling well; but to be bound to one spot, and that an inhospitable and depressing one, must intensify the feeling beyond all endurance.

Such is the egocentricity of man that when I arrived at Easter Island I easily put all these reflections aside. Now I stood on one of the most discussed places in the whole of the Pacific—a place that, for all its obvious peacefulness, had been for years a battleground and would probably continue so for very, very many years. But the battles are fought with pens and theories for ammunition; they rage round the origin of the famous statues which dot the island.

I have neither the knowledge nor the wish to rush on to ground on which so many learned anthropologists, archaeologists and ethnologists have fought the fight of controversy, and I do not propose, either, to attempt yet one more description of these stupendous works of primitive art. There seems agreement now on the approximate age of the carvings, for most authorities make them about five thousand years old. And it is also fairly generally accepted that they are the work of a race of comparatively high culture, of which all traces, but these figures, have been lost. Whether they migrated across the seas, and if so where they went and who the modern descendants

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near these five-thousand-year-old works in vigour and conviction.

Easter Island is famous for these figures ; it is not so well-known for the fact that it is, as an exception from the surrounding islands, a colony of the South American republic of Chile. The visitor's first impression is that the entire population consists of sheep and cattle, for there is quite rich pasture land and the island is used for raising livestock on a vast scale. Everywhere one goes one encounters these beasts. A few Chileans superintend operations, but the people generally are natives from other islands in the Pacific.

It was among these natives that I had my first experience of a native custom that, later, I found to be so widespread among the Polynesians that it is surprising I had not met it before, especially in view of the medical attention I had given. It gave me a new angle on the question of medical fees.

The cattle of the island were the prime movers of the train of events that led up to this experience. One of the youths of the island had been caught by a young bull and crushed against a rock. The bull had not gored him—indeed, so far as the animal's attack went, the youth went unscathed. He was badly shaken and trembling when, at last, the bull was captured and dragged away by native herdsmen armed with ropes and thick sticks, and it was this distressed state that led to his accident.

He tried to run rapidly—I think he was panic-stricken—and in so doing he tripped and fell. Under ordinary circumstances, it would probably have been no more than a harmless tumble, but the native confessed afterwards that when he pitched forward he believed that the bull had got him again. In the upshot, he stumbled awkwardly, doubled his arm underneath him, and then, howling dismally, began to writhe in pain.

In company with a Chilean, who spoke some English, I had been watching the episode, and now, at these signs of distress, I rushed forward. The injury was what might have been expected and would have been diagnosed at once by any St. John Ambulance man. It was a simple fracture of the humerus, the bone of the upper arm. The boy was perfectly fit and healthy, and there were not likely to be any complications. All that was required was that the broken forearm should be set and that he should subsequently rest while the broken ends reunited.

may be, are questions that have long been and still are debated by the learned. Though it would seem that, because of the lack of practically all tangible evidence, this is a matter in which boldness is the chief requirement for putting forward a theory, it is better to leave the savants undisturbed in their own happy hunting ground.

It is a sobering thought, however, that these statues are the work of men who lived, probably, at a time when Europe was still very much in the Stone Age and the centre of civilisation was still in the Middle East, with Ancient Egypt yet to reach her full zenith. And when one recalls that there are peoples today in the Pacific islands so primitive that they are not aware of the facts of fatherhood and live in matriarchal societies with the maternal uncle as the "father" of the children, the mystery of these vanished people deepens. The layman of imagination may well feel inclined to side with those geologists and archaeologists who believe that many of the Pacific islands, and particularly those between Australia and the south-east Asian mainland, are the remains of a lost continent. The key to the problem of the Easter Island statues may one day, when science and engineering have perfected deep-sea diving gear, be dredged from the bed of the ocean. It is a fascinating speculation.

But it is time to turn from theories, however attractive they may appear and however convenient the pegs they offer for one's own more fantastic thoughts. Let me, then, give briefly my own impression of these figures, to round off the account. Now I have seen many of the relics of the ancient civilisations of Europe and the Near and Middle East, both in their own settings and in the great museums and galleries of the world, and I think I can say that nowhere have I seen the equals of these Easter Island images except in the finest work of Egypt and Babylonia. Their primitiveness precludes comparison with the greatest work of Greece, though that may be the prejudice of a mind old fashioned enough to believe that all true art springs from the classical tradition. It is easy enough to see the influence these statues must have exercised on our "modern" artists (to use the word in its specialised and restricted sense), and it is an inevitable reflection that not one of the contemporary practitioners in the same or a derived idiom comes anywhere

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I had, of course, brought my instrument bag with me, and I was quite ready for an emergency. Having roughly splinted the broken limb, we carried the boy to the Chilean's hut and I set to work. I regretted that I had no plaster of Paris with me to set the fracture properly; but I reflected that splints had proved good enough for many generations of doctors and ambulance workers, and in any case in a simple fracture like this they would serve admirably. The only advantage of plaster was that the patient could not interfere with it, and there was no necessity to adjust the bandages. However, the Chilean promised to see that all would be well, adding, in his broken English, that "he had studied da feerst aid." And, in any event, even the native doctors or wise men were probably competent to set and look after broken limbs like this—though they would probably add incantations and magic plants just to make sure.

It was when the small operation had been completed that the surprise came. I had inevitably caused a little pain in setting the limb, for I had not thought it necessary in all the circumstances to administer any of my precious store of chloroform or even to inject a local anaesthetic. As it seemed I could not go far without being called upon to perform some surgical work or other, major or minor, it was better to reserve those supplies for any really big cases that might arise; I did not know where I might be able to replenish my reserves. He took the pain stoically—rather surprisingly so, in fact, considering his panic fear of the bull.

His left arm in a sling, he sat in a chair while the Chilean repeated to him, in his own tongue, my instructions that on no account was he to remove the bandages, the splints or the sling, and that he was to rest as much as possible. He nodded understandingly and then he looked at me expectantly.

There was no mistaking what his look intended. He was waiting for something, though what it might be I was at a loss to guess. Then, as though to emphasize the message of his expression, he held out his right hand. I stared at him completely bewildered.

The Chilean smacked his hands together and laughed.

"No been in the islands long, doctor?" he said.

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I shook my head. "My first visit to the Pacific," I replied, realising that I was making a horrible show of ignorance.

He laughed again. "Native custom, doctor. You hurt him, so you pay him." His laugh grew louder. "Dat what he waiting for."

"Pay him!" I exclaimed. "Does one usually pay patients here? Don't they pay the doctor?"

The Chilean shook his head. "Not here. Very sensible people, you see, doctor. If you hurt dem, dey expect you to pay dem. If you don't—" He made an expressive gesture of throat cutting. "No good not obeying native customs."

I was thunderstruck. It was only later that I saw the funny side of it. Then I felt outraged at a proceeding I regarded as absurd to a degree.

"What do I give him?" I demanded. "I haven't any Chilean currency and . . ."

"Oh, not money. No giva da money," said the Chilean shaking his head. "Cigarettas. Necklaces. But not too cheap. Da natives know more about tings dan dey used to."

I made a frenzied search through my pockets, half suspecting that there was a conspiracy between the native and the Chilean to get something out of me. As I do not smoke, I had no cigarettes. Being an ignoramus in the Pacific way of life, I had no necklaces—though if I had remembered my authorities I would not have ventured far without a supply of beads and Birmingham-made trinkets. Then my hand, diving deep into my inner pocket, encountered something long and slender. I sighed with relief. That would do.

It was a propelling pencil I had bought one day in Washington, when I needed to make a memorandum and found I had left my fountain pen behind me. It had cost no more than a dollar, and I hoped it would serve the purpose. It might be as insulting to offer too little as not to give anything at all.

With such grace as I could I put it in the native's hand, which, all this time, had remained obstinately outstretched. He grinned and nodded, and proceeded to screw the lead in and out in a way that threatened to wreck the whole mechanism in a very short time.

"Well, that's that," I remarked with relief. "Is that good enough?"

The Chilean looked worried. "Too good, doctor—too damn good," he said with emphasis. "You make it dear for other doctors."

I said nothing, for I was still in a state of astonishment. It seemed a very queer proceeding to me, and it was quite obvious that on these lines medical practice in the islands could not be a very lucrative profession. Certainly, the South Seas had some very topsy-turvy ideas.

On my way back to the waiting flying-boat, which was to take me back to Suva, from which I would set out again immediately, I recalled—and the thought lifted a load from my mind—that it is only in Europe that the doctor is treated like any journeyman tinker or small grocer and paid for the services he renders. In other parts of the world they take the doctor to be something more philanthropic and skilful. In China, I believe, the custom is—or was—for patients to pay their medical attendant only while they were well; if they fell ill, the doctor was clearly a man who did not deserve any reward, and the payments ceased till health was restored—certainly an effective way of promoting medical efficiency and progress. Here, it seemed, the doctor was expected to be so skilful that he could perform surgical operations without any pain at all, and if, through his blundering, he did make his patient suffer, then it was only just that he should give some recompense to his victim. It was, when one came to think of it, all very logical and very fair. Perhaps Mr. Bevan will bear these points in mind when he puts the final touches to his national health services. And in any event the modern surgeon has a very good way out of the problem: he *does* operate without causing pain, and therefore should not need to pay his patients. Memories of post-operative pain, however, rather weakened this argument. I decided that, on the whole, for the professional doctor, with no claims to priesthood or official status, the European system of fee collection for work done is, if admittedly on a lower moral plane, the more practical and the more desirable.

The launch was waiting for me when I reached the small jetty, and the coxswain was showing some signs of impatience, for he looked pointedly at his watch when I approached. I explained that there had been an accident and I had to give assistance—which appeared to satisfy him.

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I was glad that I was able to travel by that flying-boat, for it did not go direct to Suva. It was to make one of the very infrequent mail calls at Pitcairn Island, where, in the old days of sea traffic only, the post came in only once a year. Even today the state of affairs is sometimes little better. Pitcairn Island is, of course, famous for its connection with the mutiny on the *Bounty*, and the inhabitants are largely descendants of the mutineers who settled there.

Though a lonely outpost in every conceivable sense, Pitcairn has not the same air of utter desertion and desolation as Calendar Island. The inhabitants all seem perfectly happy with their lot. No doubt this is due in some measure to their being, as it were, residents instead of unwilling visitors, but it will be remembered that even the natives of Calendar have an expression of being lost to the world. Pitcairn, indeed, struck me as a very happy community, self-contained and self-confident, with little interest in the wider world which takes so little interest in the island.

As soon as the news got round that a doctor was visiting the island I was almost besieged by would-be patients. Few of them had anything seriously wrong with them and they were easily dealt with by giving a few words of advice. Indeed, there was little else I could do, for it would have been of little use to prescribe drugs and treatments that none of them could obtain. Memories of my early days in the profession were revived by this experience; it was like being back again in general practice. It is a very long time since I have had to deal with so many stomach-aches, catarrhs and minor cuts and bruises as I did on that occasion.

There was one man, however, who puzzled me at first—and in fact I could make nothing of him till he explained himself. He waited till the rest of the patients had gone and then approached me with a very confidential air.

"I waited till last, doctor," he said earnestly "because I didn't want you to be rushed on my case."

"That was very thoughtful of you," I replied, rather sarcastically, for I did not know the man from Adam and saw no reason for his singling himself out for special treatment.

"You see, doctor," he went on, "I think I need some sort

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of a general overhaul. I can't come to you and say that I've got a pain here or an ache there or I can't sleep, or anything like that. There's nothing you can put your finger on and say 'that's it.' But I do really need a general check-up."

"I see."

I asked him a few general questions, but he was as vague in his replies as in the explanations I have just reported. He seemed determined to waste my time, and I started to grow a little annoyed. I had come to see Pitcairn Island, not to spend the whole of my time chasing unspecified ailments that were, in any case, probably illusory.

It may not be to my credit, but I resolved to have a little of my own back. I took him into the hut that I had been using as a consulting room and put him through it. There were, of course, some tests I could not make—blood pressure, for example—as I had not the necessary apparatus. But I prodded him and tapped him and pummelled him—yes, let me admit it, sometimes with more severity than I would otherwise have employed—and altogether I think he had a pretty tough time.

I suppose it served me right that he appeared to enjoy it all immensely and that he showed not the slightest resentment of my comparative brutality. He looked as pleased as Punch.

At last there was nothing more I could do. I told him so.

"I've given you an overhaul that'd cost you a lot of money in London," I said, not too cordially, "and so far as I can see you're as fit as a fiddle. I hope you're satisfied now. I didn't come all the way to the Pacific to treat hypochondriacs."

"That's exactly what I wanted, doctor," he said. And I must be just to him and confess that he did show warm gratitude. "I'm very, very grateful to you."

"I'm glad of that," I observed. "What exactly did you think was wrong with you? You must have had some idea." I had asked him that before but he had dodged it neatly. Perhaps now he might be more communicative.

"Nothing, doctor," he said, blandly. "Nothing at all."

I gazed at him in blank astonishment.

"I beg your pardon?" I said incredulously. "Do you mean to say you came and pitched that story to me, wasted my time,

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and for all I know held up the flying-boat, and all the time you knew there was nothing the matter with you?"

"I'm sorry if I've wasted your time, doctor," he answered, "and held up the boat. I didn't realise it would be as bad as that."

"But why on earth did you do it?" I demanded furiously. The man's utter indifference infuriated me.

He smiled charmingly.

"Well, you see," he replied, "Pitcairn is a pretty deserted place and there's not much to talk about. But now I can say I'm the only man on the island who's had a complete overhaul by a doctor who came all the way from Great Britain to do it."

He beamed with delight.

"You—you . . ." I spluttered.

It was really too much. I had wasted the best part of an hour with him, and at the end of it he had given me this preposterous explanation. I felt like picking up my instrument case and crashing it down in his grinning face.

And then I saw the funny side of it. My anger vanished. After all, I had only myself to blame. From the start I should have been suspicious, for even in England I have come across people who are prepared to pay respectable fees merely to be able to tell their friends that Dr. So-and-so, of Harley Street, is their medical attendant. Humanity is much the same the world over, and even in the remoteness of places like Pitcairn the social striving to go one better than one's neighbour flourishes.

But he had not quite finished. The farce had to be rounded off to his satisfaction, if not to mine.

"Your fee, doctor?" he asked, with the air of a man quite used to these occasions.

I glowered at him.

"I've a good mind," I replied grimly, "to charge you at the old Harley Street rate of a guinea for every mile I've travelled to see you—and that would come to some thousands of pounds. No," I went on, "the best thing you can do is to get out and find out how fit you are by running as fast as you can before I decide to perform an operation on you—without an anæsthetic."

Not even that threat moved him. He smiled again.

"That would be too much to hope for," he said calmly. "It is enough to have been examined by you. It would be a great

honour if you should operate on me, even on the terms you mention."

He was impossible. I had had to travel all this distance to find the man with the coolest cheek in the whole world. Picking up my case, I snorted and strode out of the hut. It was not, perhaps, a dignified thing to do. It was not balm to my injured pride either, for it left him completely master of the field. But it was, nevertheless, the only thing to be done if a breach of the peace was not to be caused.

The launch was waiting for me, and I hurried aboard. Pitcairn Island, I decided, is one of the few places in the Pacific I never want to see again. For once, I was in a hurry to leave.

It was when I was comfortably settled in my seat in the cabin that I saw more completely that funny side of the affair which I had glimpsed before. I had made a fool of myself—or, rather, made easy game for a determined scoffer—and it was only childish to get angry about it. Irresistibly the desire to laugh rose in me. I struggled with it, but I could not suppress it. I chuckled. The chuckle grew into a laugh, and I laughed till the tears stood in my eyes.

The other passengers looked at me in astonishment. One of them whispered something to the steward, who had come to see what all the noise was about, and he approached me with the respectful question "was I feeling quite well?". Perhaps, poor man, he thought, I had temporarily succumbed to heat.

"I'm quite all right," I replied, calming myself with an effort. "I've just seen something funny, that's all—and I don't mean you."

He retired, though he cast a quick backward glance at me as though he was not quite satisfied. Then, seeing that I was being eyed narrowly by everyone in the cabin, I told them the story. They chuckled. They smiled. They made various polite noises of amusement. But not one of them could see anything in it so funny as I did. In fact, the story fell quite flat. I think they preferred to believe in the touch-of-the-sun theory. But I did not care. At Suva I should part from them and it would not matter one little bit to me if they went about telling their friends that they had travelled with an English surgeon who was not quite right in the head. They and I alike would have a good story to tell.

CHAPTER VIII

Mild-mannered Cannibals

Glancing at a map of the Pacific, it was difficult for me to decide where to go next. I had not unlimited time at my disposal, though I was not travelling to any sort of schedule. But my journey was not entirely goalless. My ultimate destination was Australia, where I was to meet my wife and two children, who had gone some time earlier to stay with my wife's relations. And beyond that the stern figure of duty to my practice beckoned. It was difficult sometimes to imagine myself back in Harley Street, though, as yet, I had found nothing more bizarre or surprising in the conduct of the natives of the Pacific Islands than I had experienced among certain sections of the natives of Great Britain. This is speaking as an objective observer and looking at our home customs and habits from the perspective of several thousand miles' distance. That scientific movement which calls itself Mass Observation and tries to apply to the British scene the same methods of anthropological and ethnological study as are used by scientists on primitive peoples is based on a firm foundation and sound ideas. If developed it should lead to a much greater, and less prejudiced, knowledge of ourselves.

But my chief problem was not the application of scientific theories. It was the more immediately practical problem of where to go next. Almost every one of the names on the map was a magnet to me : The Society Islands, Cook Islands, Samoa, the Solomons, the New Hebrides, New Guinea—and in between those innumerable smaller places, some represented not even by a speck on the map, had something to offer—of that I felt sure. I could not see ; that was obvious. In a single trip such as this I could not visit one-tenth of the spots I wished to see. What was my best course ?

I talked over my difficulties with a man I met—a man who had spent almost the whole of his adult life in the Pacific, though

exactly what his business was I could never discover. From various hints I gained the impression that he went here and there as his fancy took him, made some money by a trading deal, and then spent the proceeds on travelling about till the time came to replenish the exchequer by a fresh incursion into trade. One part of me—the restless, vagrant part which often cries out at the trammels and conventions of civilisation—envied him. He seemed just the person to advise me.

“If you ask me,” he said in a slow drawl, and pulling steadily at the pipe which he always smoked, “there’s only one way to see the islands—the way all the old pioneers did.”

“How do you mean?” I asked.

“Get hold of a schooner and just sail about,” he replied. “It takes a lifetime, and there’s always something left over. The Pacific hasn’t been the same since these aeroplanes started up. You never get time to let what you’ve seen sink in. I mean, in a schooner you’ve time to reflect and sort out your impressions on the voyage from one island to another—but when you fly you’re pitched straight into the next lot almost before you’ve had time to relax.”

“I won’t dispute what you say,” I returned mildly, “but not all of us have a lifetime to spend in travelling about the Pacific. We’ve got jobs and professions to go back to. If it wasn’t for the aeroplanes we’d never have a chance to see anything at all without taking leave for a couple of years at least and wasting most of it in travel. Surely it’s better to see it all that way than not at all?”

“Maybe you’re right,” he observed. “You see, I’m not that type. I’ve no ties and I don’t want any. I’m here today. I shall be here tomorrow, but no one knows, not even myself, where I shall be in a month’s time.”

“You’re lucky, I suppose,” I said. “But my problem is that there’s so much I want to see that I don’t know where to go, and my time’s getting short. I don’t want to have to go straight to Australia from here just because I can’t make up my mind where to go next.”

“Where *do* you want to go?”

“Everywhere,” I replied grandiosely and swept my hand over the map spread out in front of me. I reeled off a list of names,

each one sounding to me as the name of paradise must sound to a true Mohammedan believer.

He smiled. "Well," he commented, "even with the aeroplane you won't be able to get around like that. Want my advice?"

"I should be very grateful for it," I replied, hiding my impatience. He was like all these people whose way of life is to drift: he seemed to have time for everything except the business on hand; and it was precisely to ask his advice that I had come to him. Yet here he was apparently ignorant of the fact.

"You can fly to most of the chief places from here," he said, "but I think you'd be wasting your time if you tried to map out an itinerary based from here. You'll have to see Papua, of course—every damned tourist has to go there, though it's not the place it was when I first saw it forty-five years ago. I remember then——"

As he appeared about to embark on a long story of his early experiences of the islands, I tactfully checked him. He nodded quite good-humouredly.

"O.K.," he said—and it was the first piece of American slang I had ever heard him use. His slow drawl had a suggestion in it that it was the illegitimate offspring of an Eton and Balliol accent. "The only point I can ever see is the wisdom of not keeping to the point. No, my advice to you is to fly on to Papua and use that as your base. You'll have all the opportunities you want there—you can see all the sights people are supposed to see in the South Seas, and a good many others you're not supposed to see that are a damned sight more interesting."

He looked at me with a quizzical glance.

"You're a doctor, aren't you?"

I nodded. "Yes. A surgeon," I replied.

"Then I'm going to give you some advice you didn't ask for—it's quite free," he said, and I detected a serious intent beneath his rather flippant expression. "Don't hang around parties—I mean sightseeing parties. If you're a doctor you must be interested in mankind. Well, go and see it in Papua and the islands—it'll be worth your while. See all the set pieces if you like—I must say we've got to see them once in our lives if we come this way, but don't think that the versions of native dances you see put up for the benefit of the latest party of Yank tourists is the real

thing. And don't judge the boys (natives) by what you see in the white man's towns."

"That's the sort of thing I really want to see and study," I answered.

"You can see it," he observed, "but you won't be able to study it unless you're prepared to stay ten or a dozen or even twenty years in these parts and then you'd be not much further than the kindergarten. Ever heard of yaws and hookworm?" he demanded suddenly.

"Yes. Two things I'm specially interested in," I replied.

He nodded; and his nod was as slow as his speech. If ever a nod drawled this was it.

"You'll find them in Papua and round about—though not as much as there used to be. I'm interested, too. If you learn anything fresh about 'em, let me know. I'm always drifting round the islands, and you'll pick me up somewhere."

That was typical of him. The islands—not one island—were his home. He could speak of several thousand miles of ocean in that way. But he knew what he was talking about, and I decided to follow his advice.

Not that I needed any pressing. The very name "Papua" had for me a compelling sound. If fate directed that I should return to England after having seen only one more place in the South Seas, I felt that that single place would have had to be Papua. It was one of those things against which reason was powerless. I might tell myself that the days of the headhunters of New Guinea were over, that years of white man's government had crushed, with a heavy hand, the native cult of cannibalism, that the boyhood tales I remembered of danger and strange sights could find no parallel in reality—certainly not in the last decade of the first half of the twentieth century. Papua was to me a promised land. Here, in my imagination, was the metropolis of Polynesia, the centre of all its curious practices and dark mysteries.

As the flying-boat bore me swiftly towards this El Dorado, I was filled with strangely mixed feelings. I was trying, for one thing, to be firm and realistic with myself, constantly repeating that I must not be disappointed if I found Papua to be a very different place from what I had expected. By logic and common-

sense (which, surely, are the same things on different levels) I tried to persuade myself that romance was dead in this part of the world, even if it had ever existed, and that the fabulous natives were a dying race, withering, as primitive peoples have throughout man's long development, before the advance of a higher and more powerful culture—in this case, the white man's.

But this cold reasoning was no good. The more I tried to dismiss my glamorous ideas, the more they asserted themselves, until at last I gave up the attempt. And why, I asked myself comfortingly, as one always does in such circumstances, should I not indulge myself in a little romantic folly for a change? A surgeon's life is too full of cold analysis and pressing reality—and I was having the first real holiday I had been allowed for six weary years, during which the whole world had seemed to crumble about my head.

In this mood of romance I recalled the words the old traveller had used when he had advised me to go straight to Papua. He was right. It was all wrong to fly, to drop out of the sky on to Papua in the same matter-of-fact way as one got out of the train at Torquay or Edinburgh, Paris or Rome. A schooner was the only proper vehicle. What did time matter in this world of endless distances and leisurely living? The obsession with time, the fear that one may unwittingly be wasting a minute, is one of the harshest curses of modern western civilisation. In the ancient world it was the gods who ruled man, often with an iron hand; but not one of them ever bore with so cruel a tyranny on man as the clock does today.

The spell of anticipation was still on me when I was put ashore by the launch, and I must confess to a thrill that was almost schoolboyish in its naïveté when I caught my first glimpse of a native with head surmounted by a clump of hair that looked like the top of a pineapple. I looked at him keenly, expecting to see strong, cruel features, perhaps bedaubed with paint or even disfigured by strange ritual scars and gashes. Instead, I found myself looking on a face that was almost beatific in its mildness and watching a man who walked with a humility suggesting that he was no more than a hewer of wood and a drawer of water and did not mind being no more than that in the very least.

One of my companions on the journey was a business man

representing a firm in New York which had considerable commercial interests in the Pacific islands ; he had come that way not once but many times before. He was walking by my side at the time, and I think he noticed my expression of disappointment at the sight of the native.

"Not at all like the pictures in the boy's books, is he?" he remarked with a faint smile of amusement at me. "Couldn't find anything tamer, could you!"

"So that's what a cannibal looks like," I said, gravely disappointed and wishing I had allowed my reason to override my sense of romance on the trip.

He shook his head. "Oh, no," he replied. "That's a Motu. They've never been cannibals—or at any rate not in any real sense. They don't mind doing a spot of murder if there's nothing else to do about it. Otherwise they're tame and gentle and they make quite good servants. But don't expect even the Goaribari—they're the true cannibals, you know—to look like those frightening monsters you see in the kid's books. He's quite a likeable fellow in his non-professional moments."

"Are they still cannibals?" I asked. Reaction had now set in and I was ready to find every one of my colourful illusions torn to shreds.

He grinned. "Cannibalism doesn't exist in any British territory—you ought to know that," he answered. "All the same, the Goaribari never seem to lack a supply of skulls and other little trinkets to furnish their homes. No Goaribari hut is complete, you know, without a skull or two and other remnants of the departed feasts."

Rather macabrely, this piece of information revived my drooping spirits. Even this experienced man was ready to believe that some dark practices still survived in a land on which the impress of western civilisation was already too obvious.

Port Moresby is not one of the most beautiful towns in the world. It has that odd mixture of makeshift and permanent drabness in its appearance that seems to mark so many of the colonial capitals. But its people, white and black, seemed filled with an inexhaustible friendliness, and despite the fact that nowadays air services bring more visitors than ever before, they still manage to make each newcomer feel that he is an invited and

honoured guest. Perhaps one cannot help wondering whether this open-handed hospitality will survive the resumption of the world-tourist traffic, which, with transport facilities so greatly increased, will no doubt bring thousands to Papua where only tens came before—or if it will be transmuted into that kind of “hospitality” which the showplace is always ready to extend to the visitor—provided his bankroll is large enough.

For myself, I can only say that I found friends wherever I went, and that I had only to express a wish for the means of its gratification to be provided, if that were humanly possible. A young Australian doctor self-appointed himself my official guide—a fact that pleased me greatly for I was able to discuss with him some of the many medical problems that beset the Pacific islands, despite all the good work that has been done in the past and is still being energetically pushed forward by the Governments concerned and by such private organisations as the Rockefeller Foundation. I shall return to these medical matters later—one could write several books on them alone. In the meantime, let us return to my introduction to the true cannibals.

My friend, Dr. Alistair Pridham, took it as a matter of course that I should want to visit a Goaribari village; but I do not think that even he, with all his experience of curious visitors, quite expected so much enthusiasm as I showed. In glowing colours I pictured for him the sort of thing I hoped to find—though I hedged a little by adding that I did not suppose those conditions still existed.

His comment was enigmatic.

“You seem to have thought a lot about what you’re going to see,” he observed darkly. “Have you given a thought to what you expect to *smell*?”

I had not. That remark stands out as one of the most illuminating I heard during the whole of my visits to the islands. At one blow it pierces the bubble of romance and pseudo-romance that imagination has built up round the native. Writers may make their customs and rituals sound fascinating and picturesque, even when the ceremonies are in themselves macabre and terrible. Magic, taboo, and tribal laws are absorbing, exciting subjects, whether one reads of them in scientific textbooks or in the more colourful accounts of travellers and observers.

So it is that one is apt to lose sight of the fact that the native of the south seas is remarkably primitive, in a state of culture passed by European man very many thousands of years ago. When one is brought face to face with the reality of the situation, the fact is impressed upon one as never before that, after all, sanitation is one of the fundamentals of modern civilised life. Yet, in its present form, it is a comparative newcomer to Europe, and our contemporary habits of cleanliness, which seem so natural to us, would have been considered outlandish and ridiculous two hundred years ago. Even in the nineteenth century Lister was laughed at for insisting that surgeons and physicians should wash their hands before examining and handling patients.

Doctor though I am, I am forced to admit that there is much truth in the plea that the sanitary engineer, with his systems of water supply and scientific sewerage, has played a bigger part in freeing the civilised world of disease than any of the medical professionals.

Visiting remote country villages, where middens exist, even in England, I have been shocked and scandalised. But such places are paradises compared with the native villages of Papua and elsewhere. My doctor friend was right in his implications: one smells them rather than sees them; and it is a very curious commentary on the power of habit and adaptation to environment that the inhabitants themselves seem absolutely oblivious of the stench.

I do not know whether Pridham chose a particularly ripe specimen for my inspection for the purpose of impressing me. What I do know is that I wish I had been more fully prepared for the conditions I found—but perhaps the shock of it was intended as part of my education, a corrective for my unpractical romanticism.

My rather heated remarks on the subject were received by Pridham with a slight smile.

"Yes," he agreed, "it's pretty foul, but this is nothing to what things used to be. A hell of a lot's been done in the past twenty-five years. At least these people know now what a latrine is and can be induced to use it, instead of looking on it as some sort of white man's magic to get possession of their spirits. You know,

the sympathetic magic theory." He shrugged his shoulders significantly.

It was incredible to me, from every possible angle, that any worse conditions could have existed. In the first place, it was almost impossible to conceive that human beings could survive in greater filth than existed here. In the second, it was beyond my imagination to picture anything more horrible. This is not simply the fastidious product of the western cities speaking, for I saw, in my younger days, during the civil war in Russia—and even before, in some of the old villages—conditions that were disgusting enough. So it is not inexperience behind these views.

Here, in fact, I came face to face with one of the greatest and most perplexing problems besetting those whose work it is to administer native populations. In recent years Colonial administrations of all kinds—British, Dutch, French, and the rest—have come in for severe criticism, and many travellers and fact-finders—as they are pleased to term themselves—have descanted on the intolerable conditions they have found. They have talked of hovels and filth, of disease-ridden villages, of people to whom the most elementary hygienic amenities were not available; and they have laid the onus on the white man's indifference to the state of the native peoples except as sources of cheap labour.

No doubt there is a certain amount of truth in these criticisms. No doubt there are places both within the British Empire and in other Colonial groups where the grossest sins of imperialist exploitation have been committed and still continue to some extent. No doubt there have been laxity, neglect, indifference, and even resistance to improving the natives' lot. Let us admit all these things—but even then they do not account for the whole of the state of affairs. Over-riding everything is the outlook, culture, and tradition of the native—something powerful and almost unconquerable.

It is no good to say, as the sentimental "progressives" do, that not enough has been done. Give these people all the conveniences and amenities of the modern world, and it would make little immediate difference. The task is not simply an engineering and material one, like the replacement of mud huts by concrete

blocks of flats. The natives' world is a different world, with a different set of values and a different way of thought.

Sir James Frazer, who wrote the *Golden Bough*, may have been the first to point out that the native system of magic and tribal custom is one of the most logical in the world, once its premises are granted. It is of no use, for example, to tell the native that foul drinking water will give him disease and that he must live more cleanly and not pollute the streams and wells. According to him the illnesses are due to ghosts and devils, whom cleanliness will not appease, and it will take many, many years, I am afraid, to drive out the idea from the heads of all the native peoples. When that end is attained, I suppose, the sentimentalists will accuse the white men responsible of having wantonly destroyed a noble culture!

Pridham told me more of what conditions used to be, as heard from his father, who also had been a doctor in the islands and had seen them for himself in his early days. The details are too revolting to repeat, and no useful purpose would be served by trying to describe them—something which, in any case, I could do only at second or third hand. The fact that struck me most forcibly was not that the conditions I saw were so appalling as that so much improvement had taken place. The story of those who laboured against all the entrenched forces of ancient and firmly held beliefs is one of the epics of man's history. Some writers have already given glimpses of it—as, for example, Dr. S. M. Lambert in his fine book *A Doctor in Paradise*. But the end is not yet, nor is it so much as in sight; and it will be a long time before the whole story can be told.

I had come to that village to see cannibals, and so to realise one of the most cherished of my dreams. The sight of the filth and squalor almost drove the idea from my mind. I became obsessed with the new viewpoint I had been given of the conditions of human life, and I had discussed it heatedly—and, at times, I am afraid, rather ignorantly—with my friend Alistair Pridham. But now the topic waned and my original purpose came back to me.

"We may as well take a dekko while we're here," said Pridham, and moved forward. By some curious process of internal acclimatisation I had grown more or less used to the smell and I did not hesitate to follow him, though a few minutes earlier I

would have indignantly refused to advance another yard nearer what I felt could be nothing less than a combination of shambles and cesspool.

The mind works in some very fantastic ways, and always seems ready to push forward the claims of unreality. It was thus with me as I followed Pridham. I suddenly recalled all my old desire to see and talk with these famous cannibals, the Goaribari, and now the very squalor of the surroundings added fire to the wish. They must be magnificent men, I thought, men who spurned everything in their pursuit of power and domination. If their homes were hovels, it was, surely, because they were warriors who could not be bothered with the humdrum tasks of building and home-making.

Those whose studies of Pacific literature have been less romantic than mine—the people who read, for example, the works of the late Professor Malinowski and his followers—will not need to be told of the surprise that waited me.

A man came towards us. From his crown of curly wool, that so closely resembled the poll of an African negro, I took him at first for some sort of cross-breed. Pridham nodded shortly.

"There you are," he said. "Not much to look at or give you nightmares, are they?"

"You mean he's a Goaribari?" I asked.

Pridham nodded. "Yes. Like him?"

I did not know what to say. Nothing could have been less like the cannibal of legend. There was nothing at all impressive about this specimen. The sharply sloping forehead sweeping back from the eyes, which had the exact opposite of a fierce, commanding stare, with a nose like a parrot's beak, the soft, almost furtive and apologetic walk, the general suggestion one had only to say "Shoo!" to him and he would take to his heels—these were not included in my mental inventory of a cannibal's points. I said so, rather chapfallen, to my companion.

He chuckled. "Oh, I've seen your reaction dozens of times," he said airily, so that I felt like the most naive of tourists in the hands of a professional courier, "and I expect I shall go on seeing it a lot more times. People love romanticising things, don't they? Anything less worthy of being romanticised than a Goaribari I can't imagine."

"And so that's a cannibal," I commented slowly.

"Yes—that's a cannibal," he echoed. "I suppose you've also got the idea that in the bad old days they used to go round knocking off innocent victims to provide the Sunday joint?"

I shook my head. "Not quite," I commented.

"No—far from it," he returned. "Cannibalism was almost entirely ritual—and that's why it's so hard to stamp out. Not just simply a matter of getting a people to change from a bad diet to a good one—though I expect you know that there are some experts who say that theoretically a flesh-eating species ought to get the most nutrition out of eating its own kind. The idea roughly was that if you ate a man or a bit of him you acquired that man's strength and cunning. If they defeated their enemies, they ate them simply so that they should add the strength of their enemies to their own. In a way it was a compliment to get eaten, because it was no good troubling over small fry."

"I see," I said. It was not altogether news to me.

"I suppose the old tales of the missionary in the pot weren't all bunk," he went on, apparently anxious to display his knowledge to an attentive listener—though if the truth be told I was silent more from my own reaction of disappointment than because his narrative absorbed me. "The missionary was looked upon as a magician, a man who could control spirits of a kind. *Ergo*, if you ate him you, too, acquired a power over spirits—and as the white man's spirits (in both senses) were rather evil ones from the native's point of view, there was a special reason for dispatching the missionary to his creator."

Pridham was no doubt right, but I was in no mood for anthropology. I was annoyed with myself. I had come a long way to see cannibals, painting them with all the vivid, unlikeliest colours of a boy's imagination—and I had been warned by experience that reality in the Pacific islands is very different from pictures of that kind. And here I was as disappointed as a child at discovering that Father Christmas was really only Daddy decked out in his dressing-gown and a cotton-wool beard. So much did I resent the mild, inoffensive aspect of these specimens of the human man-eaters that I felt, for one moment, like making a personal attack on one of them. Perhaps if I had I might have had to revise my opinion of their intolerable meekness. That might

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have satisfied the imaginative, romantic part of me, though I doubt if it would have been at all comfortable.

Having finished his display of knowledge, Pridham was now talking to one of the Goaribari, and I was left in no doubt that I was the topic of the conversation. Every now and again one or other of the talkers shot a glance at me, and the native began to nod furiously. Pridham raised his hand in token of agreement and came back to me.

"I thought you'd like to do the thing thoroughly," he said, "so I've arranged for you to have a look at one of their huts—a sort of shrine, you know."

Communal living has been carried to extremes in these native settlements, for a village may consist to the outward eye of only a couple or a trio of large huts. But each is, as it were, a miniature community on its own, for it is divided into cubicles of a rough kind, each the home of a separate family. In the largest hut there is usually a place set apart as a shrine, and it is here that the young men receive instruction in the art of manhood and undergo the adolescent initiation ceremonies which form a part of the life of almost every native community.

The huts are far from being places of beauty—or even of elementary tidiness. They are dark and filthy—I think "noisome" is by no means too strong a word to use. My chief memory of them is of skulls. The shrines seem piled high with them, and it seems incredible that all these skulls can be, as their owners claim, the relics of departed ancestors. The Goaribari who showed us these sacred furnishings was himself an old man, and I am quite certain that some of the skulls were of much less age than he, so how could they possibly be ancestors I do not know. But there is much utterly inexplicable in the contemporary life of these cannibal people. No one really believes, so far as I could ascertain, that their age-old practice of man-eating, the centre and core of the whole of their spiritual beliefs, can have been completely abolished in so short a time as that during which the white man has tried to impose his own code of morals on them.

When the inspection was over, and I felt that the anti-climax was almost too great to be true, Pridham drew me aside and cast a curious grin at me.

"Feel like keeping your hand in?" he asked with assumed casualness.

I looked at him sharply. "What do you mean?" I asked.

"There's one of their people—a bigwig of some kind—laid up with a broken leg," he explained, "and they'd like you to see to it."

"I don't mind," I said, "but why pick on me? You're a doctor. These people are in an area with a medical service of some kind, aren't they? I don't want to butt in, you know."

Pridham grinned very widely and chuckled. "You don't get the point," he said. "They've treated you with unusual courtesy and shown you places that aren't open to the ordinary rubber-necking tourist. That was because I put it over on them that you were a great man in the white man's country—mother and father of all the surgeons, so to speak."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, not sure whether I liked this revelation.

"And so, you see," he continued airily, "they'd like you to take on the case, rather than have mere small fry like me or the other resident doctors."

"All right," I agreed. It seemed that nowhere could I escape the obligations of my profession.

"At least," went on Pridham reflectively, "that's what they say." He emphasised the last word in an odd way that roused my suspicions.

Pridham's slow smile, which I was beginning to dislike a little, again flickered over his face.

"Well, you see," he explained with the air of one enlightening the very green and innocent, "these people expect a doctor or anyone else for that matter to pay them for any pain inflicted on them and——"

"I know," I interposed. "I've already found that out."

He opened his eyes a little. Perhaps it impressed and surprised him that I was not quite so much of a greenhorn as he imagined.

"Then surely you see the connection?" he resumed. "They argue that as you're a stranger, you're more likely to conform to that old custom—which most of us regulars ignore nowadays—and pay up beyond the current market rate."

"What is the current market rate?" I demanded.

"The same as everywhere else—precisely as much as you can get for anything. Like everything else in the world, it's risen a good deal lately. There was a time when those blokes thought they'd been given a fortune if you turned over half a cigarette to them, but nowadays"—he shrugged his shoulders. "Western teaching has its drawbacks as well as its advantages," he added.

"I don't smoke," I said, "so I can't give them a cigarette."

"And even if you did," he returned, "it wouldn't help you. They would not be a bit pleased with the sort of cigarettes you or I would smoke. The fouler the tobacco the better in their view. There's a special line you can get down in the port for these purposes. You should carry some with you." He fumbled in his pocket and passed a small packet over to me. "Here you are. Now you'll be able to hand out the largesse with a lavish hand."

"Thanks," I said, pocketing the tobacco, the very sight of which made me feel ill. "We'll see about that."

He laughed. "Now don't go upsetting all their good opinions of you by doing something funny," he remarked.

"Good opinions?" I answered sarcastically. "It looks to me as though they think I'm a sucker—that is if your view's right."

He chuckled again and made signs to one of the natives to approach. As the man came nearer I was again struck by the utter docility of his bearing. He obeyed like a dog that has been trained not by kindness but by the whip. It was utterly incredible that he could be one of the Goaribari, the very name of whom was dreaded—or had been dreaded—throughout the island. But it is unwise anywhere, and particularly in the Pacific, to trust appearances.

After a short colloquy the native led us to a small cubicle in one of the larger huts where we found a middle-aged man lying uneasily on a bed of matting. Our guide spoke to him, and then, looking at me, he pointed to his right leg.

I examined it carefully, wishing that I could put it under the X-rays. Modern doctors, I am afraid, tend to become lazy and so grow impatient with those methods of exploration and diagnosis which served their forerunners so well in the days before electricity and physics had placed so many useful aids at the

disposal of the medical profession. Perhaps, too, one becomes a little distrustful of one's own powers of diagnosis.

But there was little difficulty about this particular case. The leg had been broken, and the fracture originally had not been at all a bad one. The trouble was that it had been badly set by unskilled hands, and if the limb was left as it was to heal the man would probably be a partial cripple and walk with a limp for the rest of his life. Such a condition is doubly dangerous in a country where a very stern, if crude, eugenic code prevails. The natives do not like cripples of any kind, and their ends are apt to come suddenly and unexpectedly in a manner that not even an English court would ascribe to an Act of God.

The only possible course, if the man was to be made properly whole again, would be to refracture the bone and reset it. Pridham agreed with me, though he said he hardly thought it worth the trouble. All the same I decided to carry on. I felt I had a reputation to preserve—though why I should worry about my reputation in an obscure Goaribari settlement is beyond logic—and carry out the operation in the proper way so far as I was able.

Of course, the main problem was medical supplies and equipment. I talked to Pridham about it and found him unexpectedly helpful. There was a district medical post not very far away, and they would have quite a lot of the things I required.

"If you write out a list," he added, "I'll have it sent along by messenger, and the things should be back here later in the day. And if you are lucky and they've just had a supply day, I expect you'll find they can send you everything you need."

For a doctor, I thought he was much too detached and uninterested. It might have been that he regretted having brought me in on this case. His little joke was not turning out quite in the way he expected.

I nodded and scribbled out a list of requirements on a leaf of my notebook. Through sheer habit, I had brought some surgical instruments with me, and there was nothing in that line I should need. Having checked it and given it to Pridham for his comments—he had none—we sent off the messenger and settled down to wait.

There was not much more to see in the village, which was

disappointing in every way to me. One of the natives brought out for my benefit some of the headdresses and regalia worn by the warriors in their ceremonial dances—and no doubt, though he did not say so, on the occasion of their ceremonial feasts of human flesh. Even these, in my then mood, failed to rouse my interest. They looked tawdry like a fancy dress seen in the broad light of day. No doubt if the atmosphere had been right, if I had seen them worn by warriors engaged in some frantic dance round a bonfire, I should have found them impressive and even exhilarating ; but they certainly had no such effect on me at that time.

Pridham and I spent the time wandering about on the outskirts of the village. Neither of us wished to remain longer than was necessary in that stench-infested spot, though it was difficult enough to escape its odours no matter what direction one took. I was feeling flat and dispirited and paid little attention to Pridham's talk as he pointed out the sights to me—the flowers, the trees, the insects, and the rest. After a little while he gave it up, not at all unwillingly, I think, for his tone had the earnestness and lack of personal interest which mark the voice of the professional guide-courier showing a tourist party round the sights of Paris or Rome or London.

Luckily the messenger returned quicker than expected ; and it was indeed my lucky day so far as that part of the proceedings went. Everything for which I asked had been sent, even the plaster of Paris, about which I had been very doubtful.

"Now," I said, "we can get to work. You can assist, Pridham. You look as though a little work wouldn't do you any sort of harm."

He grunted. "Wish to God I'd never let us in on this," he growled. "There are better ways of spending a day or two's leave than poking round a Goaribari village."

"Listen," I replied with mock severity. "I've been six years without a holiday of any kind, and I came to the Pacific so that I could get a complete break. But ever since I left England I seem to have got myself mixed up with operations, so that I don't know if I'm having a holiday or acting as a visiting surgeon on a grand tour. If anyone has the right to grouse, it's me."

"Sorry," he said quickly, with a wry smile. "After all, I fixed

this up for you, so I ought to be apologising, not moaning."

"You can work it off by giving the anæsthetic," I replied cheerfully.

Once at work he lost all his resentment. He was a good, painstaking sort of man, and I could not have wished for better assistance in the circumstances. There were no difficulties over the operation itself. We put the man to sleep, reset the bone, and then encased it in plaster of Paris. Everything went according to plan, and I do not think a better job could have been made of it in a proper operating theatre.

It was afterwards that the trouble started.

First of all the patient's relations appeared—as they invariably do on these occasions. There was a dense crowd of them, and I began to wonder how remote consanguinity had to be before personal interest evaporated in a member of the family. Only by bringing in cousins of the sixth degree, at least, could such a mass of relations be mustered—on Western standards. But then I realised that a man of importance in these parts may have many wives, each of whom was certain to bear him children. Probably, therefore, the throng that gathered about Pridham and myself represented nothing more than the patient's closest kin—a rather awe-inspiring thought.

At once they raised the question of compensation for having caused the patient pain. Their spokesman obviously expected a pretty high price, and not merely because, as Pridham had put it, I was a visitor and therefore less likely to be acquainted with local rates. He pointed out that I had not only caused pain and suffering to the patient—I had actually injured him, for I had broken his leg anew; and that was a terrible thing to do, especially as I had, by my magic, robbed the man of the elementary right of defending himself and hitting back.

Pridham, who knew the local dialect well and was acting as interpreter, grinned as he translated this to me. I stared at him in amazement.

"They think they're on to a good thing," he observed. "The best thing is to tell them to go to hell. The Resident can smooth matters over if there's trouble on the grounds that you were an ignorant stranger."

This plan did not appeal to me at all. If they wanted to

haggle, so could I. The custom is not confined to a single quarter of the globe.

"Tell them I owe them nothing," I said. "The man suffered no pain at all because he was under an anæsthetic."

Pridham grinned broadly and passed this on to the expectant relatives, among whom it seemed to cause some consternation. They went into a conference among themselves, growing quite excited in their discussion of what was, no doubt, a novel point to them. Finally their spokesman turned to Pridham and began a voluble flow of words. Now and again he shot a glance at me which indicated clearly that I was no longer standing so high in their estimation—a glance that, had he but known it, did not intimidate me but made my spirits rise again: for there was certainly nothing meek or mild about it. It was just such a fiery glance as one might expect a cannibal to give.

"They say," said Pridham blandly, though his eyes were dancing with delight, "that your argument won't wash. They asked you to deal with him and you wasted a whole afternoon while you sent a messenger to fetch boxes. If you had done your work at once the patient wouldn't have suffered all that time—so the pain was your fault."

This was ingenious and not so easy to counter. But I drew myself up and tried to look as imposing and haughty as I knew how.

"Tell them," I said loudly, so that they might hear the tone of my voice, and those among them who knew a few words of English might learn for themselves; "tell them I am insulted. Doctors from the west do not cause pain to any of their patients. If they do not cease insulting me, I shall deal with the man again—and then he will really suffer pain." Inwardly I made a small prayer for forgiveness, asking that the statement about the methods of western doctors should get overlooked in the balance sheet prepared by the Recording Angel.

Gravely, Pridham passed on this statement which again produced a noticeable effect. Clearly they did not quite know what to do. If they had foreseen that I might take this line they would not, I am sure, have asked me to intervene. Pridham had been right that they had had a greater regard for the possible profit than solicitude for the man's welfare.

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The spokesman talked again with Pridham.

"What's he saying now?" I asked.

"He's getting on the high horse, too," he replied. "He says that he knows all about white man's medicine and that even when there's no pain at the operation there's a hell of a lot afterwards, so it comes to the same thing. And he points out, quite truly, that if you do something to make the patient die, that's murder—and the Resident takes a poor view of murder even when it's done by a white man."

"Oh, very well," I said, growing impatient. If they wanted some sort of payment, they could have it; my only wish had been to show them they were not dealing with a sucker, as Pridham had called me. "Tell them I refuse to make any payment because I have caused no pain—insist on that. But I am willing to make them a gift as a memento of my visit."

"That's about it," said Pridham; and forthwith he translated my decision.

Instantly my stock rose again. Laughs and smiles replaced the glowering expressions that had been focussed on me hitherto. They are very like children in many ways, these natives. On most occasions the only reality to them is the present moment, what has happened only a few minutes before seems to be completely forgotten. On the other hand, some trivial slight they will nurse for years until it becomes an obsession with them.

With the handing over of the tobacco, the incident appeared to be settled, and we moved off to gather our traps together and return to the coast. But more was to follow.

While we had been talking some of the relations had decided to pay a visit to the sick man. They had emerged from his cubicle chattering and in a high state of excitement. In dense little knots the rest of the family forced their way in, in their turn to come out apparently amazed and thunderstruck. They kept looking at Pridham and myself, and then, finally, the spokesman again approached us, to pour out a rapid story that seemed at times to be almost too much for Pridham's useful command of the language.

"It's the plaster cast," he explained. "They've never seen one before and they think it's some new form of magic through which you're going to do the man harm. They say there's

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nothing to show that you've done anything at all, and that the leg will probably wither and die with the moon. This looks pretty serious."

"It sounds like the objections made everywhere by the old fogies to any new medical treatment. I heard much the same thing said in England over the Truetta treatment of wounds. Tell them it's my business. They asked me to operate, and I've done my very best. If they start monkeying about with that cast, they do so at their own risk."

I cannot believe that Pridham's long and fluent statement to the natives was simply a translation of what I said. He must have embroidered it quite a little, though I could never persuade him to tell me what he had said. At any rate, it appeared to quiet them for the time being, though malevolent glances reappeared, and their farewells were many times less cordial than their original greetings to us.

"The next white visitors will have a rather chilly reception, I expect," remarked Pridham casually, as I boarded the ancient but highly serviceable American car that had brought us to the scene and was to take us back to the coast.

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, I imagine they feel they've been done—first they hoped for something much more than you gave them, though Heaven knows that would have been outrageously too much only ten years ago. Secondly, they fancy all you've done is to box up the leg out of sight. They've got nothing to show for their money—or, rather, your tobacco."

"So they'll take it out of the next visitors?"

He nodded. "Yes. And if they're fussy, they'll complain to the Resident, and if they do," he went on wearily, "I shall get a dressing down for allowing you to go up country without proper escort and play about with the delicate native conscience, poor little dears."

"I'm sorry——" I began.

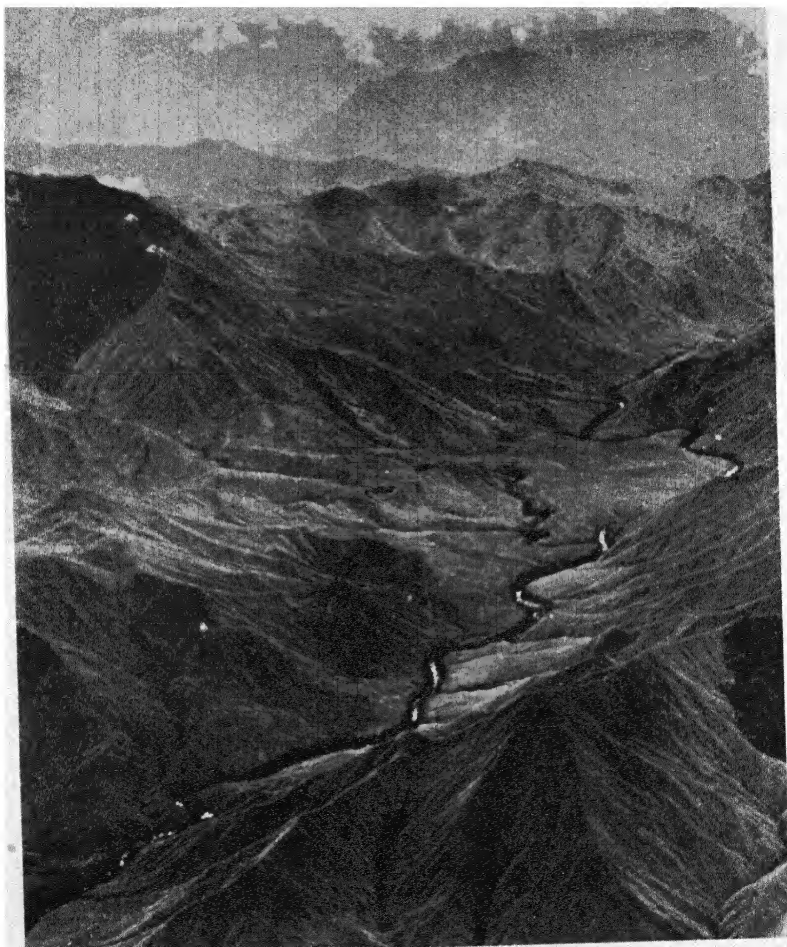
He checked me with a sharp gesture.

"Forget it," he said. "It all makes for a little variety. In this darned hole, even being called on the mat has a certain attraction. There's hookworm in plenty round here, and yaws, and all sorts of odds and ends of diseases that even now we

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haven't quite got the hang of. But so far as I'm concerned, the greatest plague of the whole lot is boredom. Today's been quite a godsend."

He relapsed into silence—a silence which no doubt was dictated by his feelings but was also made necessary by the noise of the car as it crawled laboriously forward in first gear along the bumpy track.



NEW GUINEA. . Grasslands, over 2,000 metres high, on the Upper
Purari River.



NEW GUINEA. . Grasslands, over 2,000 metres high, on the Upper Purari River.

CHAPTER IX

Pacific Ills

"There's hookworm in plenty round here, and yaws, and all sorts of odds and ends of diseases that even now we haven't quite got the hang of. . . ."

That was what Dr. Pridham had said to me as we journeyed back to the coast after I had been introduced to the Goaribari. The words stuck in my mind, for though they had not been intended to carry any special significance, and had, I believe, rather a rhetorical value in order to heighten the speaker's detestation of boredom, they were only too pathetically true. I had seen enough of these evils already with my own eyes, I had heard more from doctors and health workers whom I had met; and I knew that even the picture that he had given me of the state of affairs was several tones lighter in shade than that which depicted the real truth.

I had come to the Pacific on holiday, but I did not want only to see the "sights." It was no tourists' heaven of synthetic Pacific glamour I was in search of, though I admit I was not averse to a little of it, but the real truth. You cannot get to know a place or a person unless you find out the shadows as well as the highlights; each throws the other into proper perspective.

So it was that the mood came over me, on my return to the coast, to put aside sightseeing and self-indulgence for a little while and, instead, do a little of what the modern journalist and politician like to call "fact finding." The facts I sought were medical facts. And Papua was a good place to find them because it was the headquarters of a fairly far-reaching service. I talked to doctors, to medical missionaries, to those unqualified (in the legal sense though highly skilled in the practical one), men who have made it their life work to try to do something for the health of the Pacific islanders. I have said "men" though there are many women, too, as I had already discovered when I had

operated on that chief's child. Some of the doctors were white—the majority of them; but many were natives of various kinds, and this applied particularly to the health workers. These native medical people are perhaps the best guarantee of progress in the future. The fact that they are steadily increasing in numbers is an indication that the work of the pioneers is bearing good fruit and that a growing section of the native population is awakening to the need for better health services and is willing to play its part in establishing them.

Yes, the native doctor, the native nurse, the native health visitor—these are the keys to the conquest of the disease in the Pacific islands. It is not merely because their recruitment shows, as I have said, that the native mind is becoming more keenly aware of the necessity of stamping out the ills that have for so long been taken for granted. There is, too, a subtler reason—and one that does not reflect overmuch credit on the white men who have lorded it over the native populations since the days of Captain Cook. The native doctor and his native allies are trusted. They are not suspected of having an axe to grind. On the other hand, the white man is all too often suspected. His immediate motives may not be impugned. When a white doctor mends a broken limb, his skill is taken for granted and perhaps admired; but not a few of the natives, in their present state of development, and as a result of the experience of their fathers and grandfathers and great-grandfathers, will believe that the white doctor only does his work so that the white traders shall not lose a cheap worker. And if the white man fights for a better standard of hygiene, if he tries to stamp out such long-standing pests as yaws and hookworm—well, the cynical native suspects it is only so that the white man can reap a bigger profit from the labour of the native and the native's crops.

This is not a very pleasant sort of attitude to find, especially as the suspicion is greatly overdone—at any rate, today, though I cannot say anything about the past. But it is a fact and it has to be faced. It is part and parcel of a great and disturbing revolution in the native mind, which is changing the whole state of affairs throughout the Pacific and has its counterparts in other colonial parts of the world, such as the West Indies and Africa. But here I want to discuss medical matters; of the general

native attitude—I flinch from using the word “political”—I shall have something to say later on.

Hookworm and yaws—those are today, as they have probably been for centuries, the great plague and curse of the Pacific, though, of course, they are none the less active in other tropical parts of the world. One comes across these things everywhere, in small islands and large, among peoples of all the coloured races. To a passing medical visitor like myself the conditions appear appalling enough ; the statistics of the incidence of the disease come as a shocking blow. Yet one is given irrefutable evidence that things today are much better than they were in the past and that slow victory is being won in the long and tedious fight, which is as much against ignorance, opposition and crass stupidity (as all medical battles are) as against the diseases themselves.

Many volumes have been written about hookworm in general, and references go to it back to the oldest extant medical literature in the world. Probably it had its origin in the Middle East, the cradle of civilisation, and just as culture spread from Mesopotamia through Egypt and Greece to the rest of the world, so did a lot of unpleasant diseases, of which hookworm was destined for world-wide distribution. It came from Africa to Italy as part of the booty of the conquering Roman armies ; it crossed the Atlantic to America as a Greek gift with the cargoes of African slaves. Whether it came to the Pacific as one of the less desirable of white man’s introductions or already had an allied form there to which the importations gave strength cannot be accurately stated. The fact remains that it has been a curse for centuries ; it remains a curse ; and it will continue to be a curse for many years to come despite the gallant fight that is being waged against it.

Hookworm, of course, is an internal parasite. The favourite home of the foul little worm is the upper intestine, where it feeds upon its host’s blood, sapping his strength with ever-increasing voracity, till chronic anæmia in its worst form sets in. One can see these anæmics everywhere in the Pacific—men and women who are little more than walking ghosts with no higher function in life than to nourish the parasites that dwell within them.

If the hookworm lived, bred and died, within its host, the plague would be easier to deal with ; probably it would have been stamped out long ago. But Nature is an all-seeing designer, and provides for each of the species she has created, not only a means of livelihood, but also—and more important—a method of propagating the species and ensuring its distribution. And it is in the latter mechanism—that of breeding and distribution—that the tragic danger of the hookworm lies.

Like so many of the lower species, the female of the hookworm is little more than an egg-producing machine. It pours out eggs by the thousand. But they neither hatch nor grow in the blood of the human host. They travel into the outside world by means of the bowels. Once in the open air, the eggs produce their larvae—minute but terrible in their potentialities for evil. They seek their future hosts with an efficiency that can be admired as an example of fitness for purpose, but that is none the less frightening.

The grubs, seeking their permanent home, find their way through the skin of bare feet, or, by wriggling up weeds, will use an easier route through the softer skin of legs and ankles. Even thin stockings are no real protection, which is provided only by stout boots or shoes. Once in the body, the larva throws itself into the blood, with which it is pumped round the system until it reaches the intestinal tract. There it stays, growing larger and stronger every day. The fully mature hookworm, which has jaws of enormous strength for attaching itself to the tissues, may be an inch or more in length.

Perhaps it does not sound particularly terrible to say that each hookworm prospers on a single drop of blood per day, since it might be argued that this is infinitesimal compared with the total amount of blood in the body, and that loss of a single drop per day could not have much effect. That is a valid enough argument. But the hookworm, like troubles, does not come singly. It comes, it may be, in thousands, till the whole intestinal tract is infested. The result is obvious. There is not enough blood to nourish the body and the colony of parasites—and it is the parasites who take priority.

This bare description (from which, as a matter of fact, some of the more repulsive details have been omitted) is enough to

indicate how terrible is the menace of the hookworm. It is a repellent pest, and there is no point in trying to put a gloss on its habits. It is the product of filth, and while filth lasts and there are infected people about the danger will always be present. And there is the primary problem. Whole populations of tropical peoples are the prey of the hookworm, which, with that extraordinary tolerance of the human system, they have come to regard as a more or less normal state.

Painstaking experiments in laboratory and field have provided remedies for hookworm. *Chenopodium* has been used, with more or less success, for a long time. Carbon tetrachloride, which in these days finds a place on most domestic shelves as a cleaning fluid for clothes, also, rather surprisingly, has given good results. Tetrachlorethylene is also a powerful modern treatment. Modern chemical science is adding to the number of specifics for the ejection of the parasites from the body. Anyone who wishes to know more about the war against the hookworm should read a book, I have already mentioned, Dr. S. M. Lambert's *A Doctor in Paradise*, which is, to all intents and purposes, the story of one man's medical unit's fight against the infestation. A lot of it is highly unpleasant reading—but hookworm is a highly unpleasant subject.

Remedies exist, then. A person riddled with the worms is not, nowadays, without hope of recovery. But that does not mean either that the plague is conquered or even that it is under control. Private organisations, like the Rockefeller Foundation, as well as the official medical services of the various governments interested in the Pacific, work day and night in their efforts—but the medical facilities are relatively small to the vast area to be covered and the immense number of infected persons. The miracle is that so much has been done.

Like most problems of epidemic (one might almost, in this case, say pandemic) disease, the cure for hookworm is hygienic rather than medical in the strict sense. The true remedy lies not in curing individual cases of infestation but in creating conditions in which the hookworm cannot breed—or, at least, in which its breeding can be kept under control. While thousands, hundreds of thousands, of infested natives exist, and while the conditions under which they live are such as enable

the larvae to find the ordure in which to multiply, the menace must persist. So there must be—and has been for many years—a ceaseless campaign for educating the native in general hygiene and, in particular, to the true causes of hookworm infestation.

This is a herculean task that is not likely to be accomplished in this generation, nor perhaps in the next, though that it will eventually be completed is not to be doubted. Educational standards in the islands are rising rapidly. Old conditions are dying, together with the superstitions and complacency that went with them. One sees a primitive culture being extinguished and one regrets that so much that is interesting, picturesque, and romantic must depart from the lives of men. But when one realises that, at bottom, such things as hookworm, and those other tropical plagues, malaria and leprosy, are prime products of that culture, one's regrets are stifled. This is particularly so with a doctor, to whom an unhealthy human being is a reproach—almost a contradiction in terms.

Such sanitary conditions—or lack of them—as I saw in the Goaribari hamlet are general in the islands, but they are not universal. Where they do not exist, hookworm and other infections tend to be smaller. Many of the Papuan and other villages, for example, are built in the deltas of the slow-moving rivers, and are composed of houses on stilts—a type of architecture which, as we now know from archæological discoveries, once flourished in Europe during the Stone Ages, more particularly in the Swiss lakes. The huts are not built in this way for hygienic reasons, but as a means of ensuring safety against attack from man and beast. Yet here hygienic conditions are better, for the refuse and sewage are discharged, willy-nilly, into the water. It is the inland villages where conditions are worst.

So much, then, for hookworm, which has, as I have said, been dealt with more fully and more authoritatively by other pens. It is one of the deepest shadows of the Pacific picture—yet that picture would not be complete without it.

One of the deepest shadows—yes; but perhaps not that shadow which painters call the deepest dark. The scourge of leprosy is still widespread in the Pacific islands; malaria continues to claim its victims in thousands. But, despite all this,

I cannot help thinking that the most terrible of all physical inflictions in the tropical countries of the world, and particularly in the Pacific region, is yaws.

No one seeing a victim of advanced yaws can fail to recoil from the sight in horror—a horror that is almost immediately surmounted by a feeling of indignation and pity that human beings should be subject to so terrible a disease. It writes its signature over its victim in the most blatant fashion—and it is not a pretty one. Of course, one notices the faces first—those faces that have no nose, unless a repulsive plate of scar tissue punctured by a hole can, by some obscene courtesy, be called a nose; faces in which sometimes, and, most shockingly, most often in children, the lips have been so tightly drawn in by healing of the sores that the mouth is no more than a miniature funnel; faces from which all individuality has been not drawn but eaten away. . . .

And the bodies. Here, again, the terrible scars imprint themselves, twisting and deforming as they harden. The fingers and toes, drawn in by the same process, curl downwards so that they look like the claws of some evil bird of prey. There are cases so mutilated by the disease that they have become no more than lewd caricatures of human beings, creatures from a witches' world of horrors.

It would be appalling enough if such cases as these were comparatively rare, but they are not. Not merely single individuals or even families but whole village communities become the prey of the plague. There are places where a quarter, a third, or even more, of the inhabitants are advanced yaws-victims such as the one of which I have tried to give as unsensational a description as I can.

But to the experienced eye there is nothing entirely unfamiliar about the state of the yaws victim. The sketch I have given might apply equally to a case of advanced and untreated syphilis, and it is little wonder that the early explorers of the Pacific, men who had become only too familiar with the effects of venereal disease among the sailors who served under them, described this condition as syphilitic. Yet Captain Cook, that shrewd observer and cautious commentator, tells us that when he first visited the Pacific on his voyages of discovery he found the

disease well established and admittedly so by the natives. It was not—like not a few other scourges—brought to the Pacific by the white man and is not an offshoot of white man's influence on the native population. Yaws belongs to the tropics.

The similarity between yaws and syphilis, and their earlier identification, gave rise to the belief among missionaries and others that the native races of the Pacific islands were inherently vicious. This is one of those hurried damnations that science has done a lot to disprove.

In cold fact syphilis is, except as the product of the impact of western civilisation, practically unknown in the Pacific islands. Dr. Lambert, to whose book, *A Doctor in Paradise*, several references have been made, records that in all his years in the Pacific he discovered at most only a few doubtful cases of true syphilis. Although more modern methods of scientific diagnosis have revealed its existence in certain cases, this modifies only slightly the statement that syphilis is not a typical Pacific island malady—and it complicates the problem of yaws.

What, then, is yaws? Perhaps it would be overbold to dogmatise on this subject, on which so many experts working in the field for years still disagree. Its parallelism to syphilis is only too clear, yet there are also remarkable differences. The cause of it is a germ, but it is not transmitted by sexual intercourse. The yaws germ breeds in filth and it is carried by filth. Like so many of the ills of the Pacific, it is a product of the utter lack of hygiene. Unlike syphilis, it is neither hereditary nor congenital. But, on the other hand, it runs through the same three or four stages as true syphilis, even leading, in the most advanced cases, though only occasionally, to that complete mental and physical breakdown known as general paralysis of the insane—the final fate of the syphilitic. The disease spreads itself, like syphilis, all over the body from a single initial infection. Yet revolting and terrible though the sores are, they are not true chancres and do not leave the characteristic scar behind them.

When the matter is taken further into the arbitration of the bacteriologist, the close similarity becomes even more striking. For both syphilis and yaws are the product of germs belonging to the family *Treponema*—and they are so much alike that only an expert can differentiate the two. Most striking of all is the

fact that yaws can be successfully treated by precisely the same methods as are used for syphilis—arsenic, salvarsan and the sulphonamide descendants, and now, of course, penicillin. The remedies which are specific for syphilis are specific also for yaws.

The relationship between the two diseases is so close—yet their differences are, at the same time, so marked—that some specialists have made the suggestion that the bacteria causing yaws are a modification of that from which the syphilis infection comes. The germ, following the laws of survival, has adapted itself to different conditions and has adopted a different method of distribution. The converse may, of course, be the truth : that syphilis is a modification of yaws, but there is not yet, and may never be, the evidence on which to judge between the two theories.

The war against yaws must be long and bitter—a fight, once more, against ignorance and complacency as well as against infection. The individual victim is today more certain of effective treatment than his father, but the root cause is the creation of higher standards of hygiene in the Pacific islands generally.

Nothing is more terrible than the way in which natives accept the disease as part of the normal run of things. The general attitude appears to be that, as it is almost certain for one to become infected sooner or later, it is better to get it over while one is young and so have done with it. That is why in infected villages mothers deliberately expose their children to the infection by making them mix with yaws victims. Before this practice is dismissed as the depths of criminal ignorance, let it be remembered that in the Victorian era of large families, most—probably the majority—of English mothers would try to “get the whole family over it” at one blow by allowing the child with measles or chicken pox or mumps to play with its brothers and sisters ; they would even take the same course with smallpox. Moreover, let it be remembered, too, that the venereal diseases—of which syphilis, the cousin of yaws, is one—are one of the most common of our deadly diseases, and that the conquest of these is, like the conquest of yaws, largely an hygienic matter at bottom. Perhaps, after all, we are not so very much ahead of the Pacific islanders when things are reduced to essentials. Western man’s

great advantage over the native is that he has greater opportunities provided for him for retrieving his mistakes.

Yaws is one of the greatest problems of health in the Pacific, yet, curiously, it has one aspect that is almost advantageous. It gives the native peoples immunity to true syphilis. So far as medical records go, even in those islands where the two diseases are to be found, no one person is ever infected with both. Elsewhere the presence of yaws has acted as a barrier to the spread of syphilis brought by traders and sailors. It is a perhaps small item to write on the credit side of the ledger, yet it is not entirely an unimportant one.

The more one investigates the question of health in the Pacific, the more it is seen to be one of hygiene—hygiene—hygiene. This is something in which the doctors and the educational services can do much but not everything. It is a question that underlies the whole problem of administration and development of the Pacific territories. Factually, one thinks, when gazing upon some squalid Pacific village of hovels: "If this could be swept away and decent housing provided, what a difference it would make!"

No doubt it would. No doubt the replacement of the primitive huts of the native by good, clean houses would do a great deal. Yet the biggest problem of all would not be solved. There would remain the native himself and his attitude to life. His culture is highly involved; his religious and ethical system is complicated and is probably the result of many centuries of evolution; in some crafts and occupations he has developed a high practical skill that often puts the westerner to shame. Yet, in spite of all this, there are some things in which he stands nearer to the animal ancestors from which he sprang than to humanity. Even today, after years of effort, probably the majority of natives have simply no conception of cleanliness. He obeys the promptings and needs of his body as simply and naturally as the animal in wood or field. Indeed, so far as the excretory functions are concerned, he compares unfavourably with many so-called lower animals—for example, the cat.

The doctor in the islands is concerned primarily with disease as he finds it—and with its cure and eradication if such be possible. The bigger, harder task is that of the administrator

and planner, the men who think in long terms of years and not merely in gaining an immediate advantage. The doctor can guide, suggest, provide facts on which the long-term plans may be based or by which they may be modified ; but this primary task, in the Pacific as elsewhere, is always to answer the challenge of the moment set up by a suffering human being. It cannot be too often repeated that the key to creating healthy communities in the Pacific—again as elsewhere—is to be found in education in the bases of healthy living. Here, indeed, the problem is immense ; for it is not a matter of raising a standard of thought and life as it is when dealing with the uneducated portion of a European community. In the Pacific the task is to teach a population to think in entirely new terms and to live in an entirely new way ; it means fighting and defeating the habits and traditions that have become ingrained through the centuries. That is no over-statement, for these primitive cultures are fossilised, static ones, in which the idea of progress or even modification is practically unknown ; and the greatest individual factor in keeping things as they are is fear, for mankind's basic emotions are the same everywhere.

That sums it up. The Pacific islander fears, in common with all primitive peoples, the wrong things. He fears ghosts more than men. He respects tabus and customs that, though they may, as Freud suggested, have their origin in a desire to prevent incest, no longer have any real and practical validity. He fears the medicine-man, the evil eye, the curse, the spell. All these he venerates in a way that seems beyond the powers of modern civilised man.

Yet, though he has this capacity for fear, he does not even try to avoid the things that are his real enemies—the dirt and squalor of his surroundings, the germs that lurk in these and other things, the too-intimate contact of human bodies, all the hundred-and-one things which are at once the roots and fertilizers of disease and plague. He runs away from devils that exist only in the folklore of his tribe—and his running, unprotected feet plough through earth teeming with hookworm larvae. He takes good care that the crocodiles will not get him, but he pays no attention to the malarial mosquitoes that rise in clouds from those stagnant swamps.

ONE HORIZON

When the task is viewed in more detail, its immenseness becomes clearer still. There may be three main cultures, according to the anthropologists, in the Pacific; the Polynesian, the Micronesian and the Melanesian, and each of these has to be approached in a different way. That is difficult enough; but within these broad classes there are many sub-divisions, so that almost every sept in a tribe seems to have its own particular variation. Over and above these main groups there are individual cultures, like that of the Rennell Island, which, again, are different.

Yes, educating the Pacific islander to the truth about his well-being is a task from which even the boldest and most persevering person might shrink. Yet everywhere one goes one meets men who carry on with it, methodically, patiently, steadfastly, recognising all the difficulties, seeing clearly the herculean labour before them yet never being completely daunted by it. Little by little they gain ground, now here, now there, and, though it appears trivial at the time, a poor reward for so much work, in ten or twenty years the total is not at all insignificant.

I have talked with doctors and civil administrators who have spent the greater part of their adult lives in the islands. Often their conversation hinted that they felt they were battling with a hopeless task. Yet always, sooner or later, their faith peeped out. "Well, it's better than it was," they would say. And in that is their reward, another step forward in reclaiming the Pacific from the real demons of dirt, disease and ignorance, in whose clutches they have remained so long.

This is the dark side of the picture of medical work in the Pacific. It is illumined only by the untiring faith and hope of the men who toil ceaselessly among the islands. I have far from overdrawn it, nor have I laid on colours that are too sombre. But there is a lighter side to it, and it is this which no doubt makes life worth while to the doctors and health workers in the area. For when one deals with the ignorant, the superstitious and the primitive, one cannot fail to encounter incidents that brighten the day's work like a sudden stab of sunshine in an overcast sky.

I was given examples of this sort of light relief in my con-

versations with doctors, not once, but many times, and I have already recounted some of my own experiences. Here, to round off this chapter, to lift the gloom a little from the low-tone of the scene I had portrayed, is the story of an incident I witnessed, though I was not the doctor primarily concerned with it.

It happened while I was still in Papua. One of the Australian doctors, a hard-bitten, rather taciturn man, invited me to accompany him on a trip into the interior, a village that was on his "round" as he called it, as though he had a visiting list like the most respectable general practitioner in an expensive suburb. I was delighted to accept his invitation, though he warned me that the going would be rough and I would have to live hard for ten days or so.

For the first couple of days I began to regret that I had not accepted his warnings and declined the trip; nor was I reassured when his assistant, a native health worker of some medical attainments who spoke excellent English with an Australian accent, told me that the real part of the journey had not yet begun. He was right. For more than a day we followed a trail that was almost invisible to my inexperienced eye, though I was informed it was quite a good road really. At times I felt like Captain Cook and Dr. Livingstone rolled into one. There is little I remember clearly of the journey except the insects. They flew, crawled, danced and skated round me everywhere I went, invaded my sleep and provided an ever-varying escort during my waking hours. When, some years ago, Miss Evelyn Cheesman, the entomologist and naturalist, visited this part of the world she brought back with her so many specimens of rare and unknown species that they were expected to keep the classification experts in England busy for many years to come. I remain firmly convinced that if she accompanied us on that trip she would have found at least as many more new trophies for her bag—or net.

At last it was over and we came to a typical native village—typical, that is to say, in its general layout and first appearance, but it was relatively clean. This was a place that had been on a regular basis of inspection for many years and, little by little, the inhabitants were adopting new and cleaner ways of living. If the air was not balmy, it had not that odour of a combined

shambles and midden which had characterised the Goaribari hamlet I had visited with Pridham.

Dr. Hayes, my host, dealt with the cases in a matter-of-fact but very efficient manner. There was the usual crop of malaria, hookworm and yaws, in addition to a miscellaneous collection of minor ailments. What struck me most deeply about the yaws cases was that they were all young children—the oldest of them was only six years of age. But it is during those early years, before comparative immunity has been acquired, that the infection takes hold ; and it accounts for the fact that so many young adults show the disease in its most advanced and horrible form.

But I am not going to dwell again on the horrors of yaws. This affair has a lighter touch.

Among the miscellaneous patients was a woman who presented for our inspection one of the most grossly distended abdomens I have ever seen. To European eyes, the bellies of most native women look unpleasantly protruberant, but this put all the normal women's to shame. I confess I wanted to laugh ; the unfortunate lady reminded me too strongly of a partially deflated barrage balloon, such as we used to see on the ground during the war.

She had come to us under protest and at the insistence of her relations. In her view the case was simple. She had offended the local witch doctor and this was his revenge. To me that was just ridiculous, but Dr. Hayes took the matter seriously—or so it seemed. He sympathised with her and asked for further details of the curse. It was then that I saw method in his madness. The spell laid upon her had inhibited her natural functions, and she had not passed water for a long time—though for just how long she could not say, for the native mind is notoriously vague on the matter of time.

The shrewd Dr. Hayes had got all the information he wanted, and he made a rapid examination, calling me in (as a matter of sheer courtesy, I have no doubt whatsoever) to confirm his diagnosis. It was a simple spasm which could be relieved by an elementary operation with a catheter.

She was laid on a couch and the operation was performed. The effect was almost miraculous, for that grotesque distension

seemed to fade before her eyes as the pent-up fluid drained away. And again that image of a barrage balloon floated before my mind's eye : the final stages of deflation were in progress. Nor was this so bad an analogy, for she had, so to speak, been inflated with her own water.

After a little while she was able to go away, markedly reduced to proportions that were normal to the native eye, though I do not think they would attract the eye of a Hollywood scout for a new glamour star .

There the matter should have ended. The relatives, who had, as usual, watched with the greatest interest, expressed their gratitude for the potency of the white man's skill. But Dr. Hayes, drawing on his long experience, had a premonition that it might lead to some surprising development. It did.

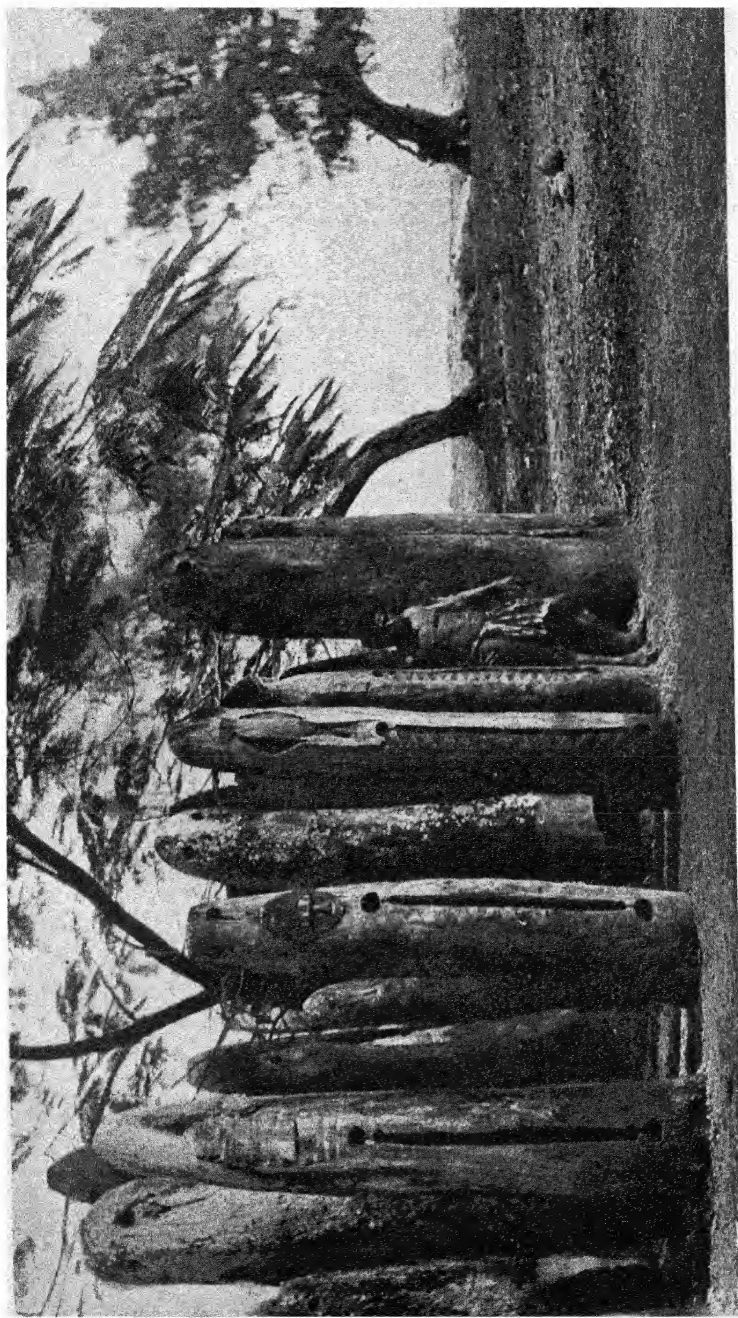
Next day Dr. Hayes's morning surgery seemed to include the greater part of the village population—it must, I think, have comprised every member with the slightest pretensions to adiposity. There were old men and old women who, distended with dropsy, had managed to stagger to the hut or had even prevailed upon relations to carry them there—something of an achievement, for the native mind has no great respect for feeble age, and it is only the sharp, supervising eye of the white man that prevents a greater recourse to the old habit of exposing useless old people to death in the woods, once universal. And there were younger people with all sorts of swellings, enlargements and deformations.

In their view it was all quite simple. The previous day's patient had been gross and been reduced in a matter of hours. The same process could be applied equally to them. All clamoured for the powerful magic of the silver stick.

I confess I should not have liked to be Dr. Hayes at that moment. Yet he took it calmly. It was all in the day's work, he told me afterwards, when by a combination of diplomacy, argument and threats, he had managed to send away all except those for whom he could prescribe some treatment. And when, later, I recalled this statement of his, a statement which so clearly and vividly threw into relief the day-to-day work of the Pacific doctor, I felt a little humbled. How often had I groaned and even lost my temper (in private) at the odd ways and

unreasonable behaviour of "difficult" patients in Harley Street? And what was the most awkward of these compared to that mass invasion? I imagined my London rooms besieged. . . .

On the whole, I do not think I should like to be a doctor in the Pacific, but I shall never use a catheter again without calling it in my mind the magic of the silver stick. And if any unfortunate patient of mine in the future, needing an operation with a catheter, should notice that I forget myself so far as to chuckle quietly, perhaps he will forgive me, realising that I see not him (or her) but a pressing throng of dark skins set against a background of Papuan vegetation.



NEW HEBRIDES. Drums and Idols at Lilipa, Protection Island.

CHAPTER X

Odd Thoughts and Experiences

One of the difficulties about writing of the Pacific islands is that every time one sets out to relate an experience, an adventure, or a mere anecdote, one is assailed by the accusing thought that it has all been done before. Since Captain Cook wrote his famous book—a book that remains one of the best of all accounts of the South Seas—the place has, to put it bluntly, become much too popular with writers, artists, and commentators. Performers of all kinds have been cashing in on the reputation of the Pacific and making a good thing of it. A dance band leader who has never before been further south than Brighton has only to introduce an electric guitar into his orchestra to entitle him to call it a Hawaiian band—and sit back and watch the profits grow. Makers of travel films, barren of other ideas, use the islands as their one unfailing stand-by. And even in the higher branches of the so-called culture, people like Gauguin have conferred a meretricious notoriety on the scene.

But this is no excuse for failing to record what one has seen—and, more to the point, how one has reacted. For that is the surprising thing about the islands. Much publicised places have the habit of being bitterly disappointing. Like more familiar places, they never come up to the posters and the picture post-cards.

But that does not apply to the Pacific. One visits those spots which have had all the ballyhoo in the world let loose on them—Honolulu, for example; and the reality does not fail to charm. One is, instead, impressed by the astonishing restraint of the publicity agents—which, in itself, is a remarkable experience well worth recording.

The trick is brought off time and again. In fact, it never seems to fail. In the end, one comes to the conclusion that the writer has yet to be born who can do the Pacific islands full

justice. In passing, I may remark that I do not make any claim whatsoever that this book of random reflections is the missing *magnum opus*.

I remember feeling a little bored when it was suggested to me, during my stay in Papua, that I should join a party who were going to visit a neighbouring island to see a demonstration of fire-walking. In fact, I almost refused. There was sure to be nothing much in it, I told myself. It was one of those things which had caught the popular imagination and been grossly overdone. But in the end I decided to go. It would be humiliating to have to admit, on my return home, that I had not seen any fire-walking, for that was one of the things I was sure to be asked about, since it is one of the stock tricks of the Pacific publicity agents. Bored I might be, disappointed I almost certainly would be, but I had to go, if only for the sake of completeness. One has, after all, to eat the dough of a bun as well as the currants ; not all of us can have the luck of Jack Horner and be called good boys for picking out the plums and leaving the rest.

There was a small Englishman in charge of the party. By saying he was an Englishman, I mean that he had been born in England of English parents though he had spent the greater part of his adult life in the Pacific. How long that might have been, I do not even care to guess, for there was something ageless about him. His skin was dry and discoloured and seemed merely stretched over the bones of his skeleton. His lips were very thin and straight ; they rarely smiled. His eyes had that curious far-away expression one notices among sailors, aviators, and mountaineers—the gaze of men who have perpetually to focus their eyes on far horizons and who are not concerned with the trivialities near at hand. At any rate, he was not a young man. Someone told me that twenty years ago he had still looked the same, and even then no one could remember the place without him. He had given his soul, as so many white men do, to the Pacific ; and perhaps in return the Pacific had conferred on him immortality in the flesh.

He seemed to guess the reasons behind my initial reluctance to join the expedition.

“ Suppose you think it’s just another Maskelyne show,” he grunted. He never wasted words. “ Get that idea out. It’s

worth seeing. I've seen it over and over again, and I always get a kick out of it."

I accepted his word for it, though I did not fail to remember (rather ungenerously) that he was getting paid at the rate of so much per head for conducting the visit, and that it was in his interest to sell as many seats in the boat as he could. To the barker, his own show is always the greatest on earth, never failing to amaze and astound. Yet this tight-lipped man was no barker, no slick salesman. On reflection, I took the more charitable view that it was a tribute to my intelligence that he had deigned to say so much to me. It was something of an event when any words issued from his mouth, apart from sharp orders, usually given in the local dialect.

During the two hours' sail to the island I reflected again on the extraordinary beauty of this part of the world and of the remarkable paradoxes by which nature achieves the miracle. One looks on a perfectly coloured scene, bright, sparkling, above all perfectly harmonious. Yet if one concentrates one's attention on a single detail—on the foliage or the flowers or even the unbelievable tint of the sea itself, one is almost appalled by the crudity of the individual colour. Early technicolor films were almost pastel tints compared with these hues, seen by themselves; and any artist who put them down literally on canvas would get short shrift from the critics—even from those with leanings towards modernism. Yet nature throws all these glaring contrasts and rank clashes together and produces a picture that is without rival anywhere in the world.

So it is with form. One steps into a new world in the Pacific. The trees throw utterly strange silhouettes against the sky; the fish are of the strangest and most bizarre shapes; and each, considered by itself, may be frankly ugly. Yet the whole blends and fits together. The jagged outlines, the trailing forms, join together into the complete, integrated whole like the odd pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. That, incidentally, raises another aspect of Pacific scenery. For myself, at any rate, I was never conscious of form at first. What I saw was so many units of colour blended into a perfect whole, on the same principle but with utterly incomparable results as the work of an abstract flavour. It was only when one had absorbed the colour into one's inner self

that the lineaments stood out—and then it was almost by chance. The green of the foliage suddenly dissolved into curved spines like the back of a dinosaur—cruel, ugly spines, yet inseparable from the beauty of the whole to which they contributed.

And here, above all other places in the world, nature has put all her goods into the shop window. One does not have to seek out some special spot to command a famous view. Approach an island from whatever angle you like, and there is an æsthetic thrill for you. The seas, and specially the shallow lagoons, teem with exotic fish of the most fantastic kinds. But one does not have to chase them with a net so that one may admire their beauties in an aquarium or in the soulless glass case of the museum. The lagoons are nature's own public aquaria, and one can look down through water so transparent that it barely seems to exist, to study at one's leisure the fish in their own natural quarters. Those quarters themselves are one of nature's major miracles, for here are colours, shapes, and proportions that no mere human artist could conceive.

Around me was chatter and talk, but I preferred to remain silent (an unusual state for me, some of my friends might say). There are moments when talk seems the most futile of human attributes.

It was a mixed party in the boat, about ten in all, so far as I remember. There were, of course, the inevitable Americans, for no sight-seeing expedition is complete in the Pacific without one or more citizens of the United States. The rest were Australians and New Zealanders and, oddly enough, for one does not see many of them in these parts, a Frenchman.

If the weather-beaten Englishman in charge was, as I have said, no barker, he was also no guide-courier. Not once did he open his mouth during the trip, beyond the necessities of giving orders to the Kanaka crew and from time to time taking his pipe from between his lips to recharge it. I am no smoker, but my smoking friends tell me it is murder to refill a hot pipe. This man apparently did not stop at murder—and I should imagine that, if the need arose, that might be true in a more literal sense. He fascinated me, and I speculated a good deal on his background. What was he, and why had he come to the Pacific in the first place? He was not the beachcomber of sordid romance, nor was he the

trader, but he seemed to come midway between the two, since, while he was ready to do any odd job, he was by no means a waster or down-and-out. Possibly, I decided, giving rein to my often rosy-tinted imagination, he made a trip to the Pacific as a young man and found himself unable to shake off its enthralling spell. If that were so, he would be in good company.

At last we landed. There was no jetty at the beach, and the water was too shallow to accommodate close in the craft in which we had made the voyage. Accordingly, we were put ashore in native outriggers. For many of the party this seemed the most hazardous part of the trip, though the water was so shallow it would have been possible to wade in it without great discomfort. Two American girls who were in the party regretted the absence of any surf to add to the excitement.

From the beach we proceeded on foot along a passable trail to the village where the dance was to take place. The journey was perhaps a couple of miles, though it seemed longer. At last we came to the village. It looked cleaner than any I had yet seen in that part of the world, and instantly my suspicions were aroused. This suggested to me an organised show place, where the dance had probably been turned into a lucrative source of revenue. As elsewhere in the world, when things like this become professionalised, they tend to become debased, and my mind veered back to my original point of view, expressed by our guiding Englishman when he had said I expected a Maskelyne's magic entertainment. I am not often in this highly sceptical mood. One of the local devils, of whom the natives, even when christianised, go in such fear, must have entered into me and infused doubt into my heart at every turn.

So I was only too ready to be "superior" and to be unimpressed. I was prepared to assume a lordly disdain for the American contingent who, I knew from experience, would be enthusiastic, whatever they saw. There is no people to whom the show is more the thing; the methods by which it is produced are of no account; and if the fake entertains better than the true article, they are more than receptive of the imitation. No doubt it is better business.

If I have seemed to labour this point of my sceptical attitude it is intentional. I wish to make it quite plain that I was one of

those who came not merely to scoff but to ridicule—yet I remained if not to pray, at any rate to admire. For I do not think that any spectacle or ritual could be more profoundly impressive than this fire-walking. It is undoubtedly the most incredible thing I have ever witnessed ; it reduced me to the mood of the countryman who, on being shown a giraffe at the zoo, gaped and announced there was no such thing.

It is almost impossible to describe. The actual fire-walking is preceded by a ritual dance of a very complicated type, the temper of which grows increasingly hotter, as though the participants are raising themselves to the temperature of the furnace through which they will presently walk. In my ignorance, I had expected only to see a few small fires through which the dancers would leap. There was nothing so simple. The fire consists of a glowing red bed of charcoal kept alight in a specially dug trench. Nor do the performers leap through it, as I had imagined. They do quite definitely walk, and the idea that they move so quickly that there is no time for their feet to become scorched is obviously wrong.

For a few moments after the affair was over I remained silent, completely taken up with the impressiveness of what I had seen. Then my scientific conscience asserted itself. It was, no doubt, a most remarkable spectacle—but so, too, are the acts staged by modern magicians on the London stage. The latter are admittedly illusions, making use of, it seems, nearly all the known laws of optics and mechanics. This fire-walking, too, might be also an illusion, though it was difficult to imagine that these natives had the necessary knowledge. Yet the audience to which they normally presented was composed of utterly unsophisticated people, and probably they would not notice the simplest and most obvious fake, such as an artificial heatproof sole of some kind attached to the foot.

“ Tell me,” I said to our guide, “ can I examine one of the fire-walkers immediately he comes through the furnace ? ”

He seemed very doubtful. The request had been made many times by investigating white men, but it had been gratified only in very few cases. Those taking part, he explained, had been sanctified by a special esoteric ritual, and most of them took the view that to be touched by a white man would be to incur the

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wrath of the local spirits. But he was not entirely without hope. A few men would submit to examination in return for a suitable gift.

"Bribe them with anything you like," I replied grandly. "I won't leave this place till I've found out more about it."

He crossed and had a word with the chief, who was standing a little apart from the main crowd, though surrounded by his own personal retinue, among whom it was easy to distinguish a witch doctor by his grotesque feathered decorations and macabre painting.

It was clear that the negotiations were not going favourably for me at first. The chief and the witch doctor made gestures that were unmistakably negative. But our guide persisted, and after a little while the witch doctor walked over to a little group who were to give the second performance. There was a great deal of talk, and then our guide nodded and glanced across to me significantly. I had won my point.

He returned to confirm in words what his expression had already conveyed.

"You're in luck," he said shortly. "But it's cost me nearly the whole of my tobacco, and I doubt if I've enough to last out the return trip. If I don't smoke, doctor, I'm likely to pile the boat up on a reef, but that's your funeral, and you'll have to sort it out with the others. Go and stand over there by the witch doctor, and he'll let you do what you like with the last man through."

I was much too excited at the success of my request to take any notice of his forebodings. The only thing that broke through my eager thoughts was that for once he had made quite a long speech. No doubt it was a great honour for me, and perhaps I was ungrateful not to appreciate it more.

The witch doctor's expression was hardly one of welcome; rather did it convey hostile tolerance. The resentment of these functionaries to white men's investigations is not, I think, that of the charlatan who fears to be exposed but rather a natural dislike of being distrusted and of having rites in which they implicitly believe thrown open to doubt. They lose face not only in their own estimation but also in their followers.

I was not, however, concerned with the personal feelings of

this individual—one of a class from which my own profession is supposed to have sprung, and whose methods, according to some critics, still survive, particularly in Harley Street. The dance was beginning again, and, from this point of better vantage, I was concentrating all my attention on the men as they leapt and span and then forged their way through the glowing coals.

It was obvious that they were wearing no protection on their feet. Indeed, it was not their feet which attracted my interested attention. What struck me most was the expression in their eyes. It was strained and fixed—but not the look of the man who is bearing pain stoically; it was the unfocused gaze of the sleep-walker. They sweated and their breathing came stertorously. These, too, are sometimes the signs of pain heroically borne, but they were not so in this case. They were men in ecstasy.

As soon as the last one had plunged his way through the end of the trough, I advanced quickly on him. The witch doctor checked me with a warning gesture, making it plain that I must not seize on the man in that fashion. He spoke to him rapidly and in a soothing tone that had a note of command, and then he signed for me to advance.

As I drew near, the dancer looked about him and then stared at me, at first uncomprehendingly and then with an expression of fear. It was as though I represented to him something that had no place in the world of reality—the figure of a dream suddenly come true. I signed to him to lie down. He obeyed with an air of complete submission. There was nothing about him now that suggested he had, only a few minutes before, been worked up to a demoniacal frenzy.

My examination was brief but thorough. Naturally I paid most attention to the soles of his feet, for it was these which had, according to the evidence of my own eyes, come in actual contact with the glowing charcoal. There were no signs of burning at all—not even the red inflammation of a first-degree burn. The soles were hard and calloused as those of all natives are, for, from their first steps, they go without shoes and their feet seem less sensitive to roughness in the ground than the paws of many animals. But even this should have shown some slight evidence of the heat. There was none.

As for his general physical condition, this was what might

have been expected of a man who had been indulging in very violent exercise. He was breathing heavily and his heart was beating a little beyond the normal rate ; but there was nothing unsound about it. He showed just the signs that would have been seen if one examined, say, an Olympic Games runner immediately after he had completed a heat.

I do not know what I expected to see. I knew that fire-dancers had been examined before—and more elaborately than I had been able to do—and the results, testified to by highly competent medical men, had been negative. Certainly if I had had some vague hope of discovering something that had escaped the keen eyes of those who had gone before me, I was bitterly disappointed. But I do not think that there was any such idea in my mind. Curiosity is one of my strongest vices or virtues, according to your point of view. But the satisfaction I get from it is purely personal and æsthetic ; it is not prompted by either the “ I’ve-got-to-know ” at all costs of the born research worker or by the sneaking thought that I may make a sensational discovery and upset all the authorities. So in this case it was simply interest from my own particular angle that caused me to examine the dancer.

There have been many “ explanations ” of this fire-dancing, and who am I that I should try to pick and choose between them ? I can put down what I saw with my own eyes and express my own opinion. It has been suggested that the dancers progress so rapidly through the trench that there is not time for any burns to develop. That is possible. Most schoolboys at one time or another shock their parents by picking up a red hot cinder that has fallen from the fire ; it is quite a safe trick, however dangerous it may look, provided it is carried out quickly enough. But that explanation cannot apply to the exhibition I saw, for, with that very theory in mind, I paid particular attention to the movement through the trench, refusing to allow my powers of observation to be dulled by the general excitement. I am prepared to swear that the dancers’ feet remained in contact with the coals long enough for any ordinary person to be burnt.

Another physical explanation is that the actual upper surface of the charcoal is ash, which acts as an insulator of the heat, which it reduces sufficiently not to harm the thick, horny soles of the

natives' feet. There is, I think, quite a lot in this, according to my own observations, though I insist that it does not represent the whole truth.

There remains the theory of hypnotism. One school of thought has suggested for the explanation of fire-dancing—as of the fabulous Indian rope trick—that it is the audience which is hypnotised, and that the whole thing is an illusion. This, I think, can be dismissed almost out of hand. The possibility of its working in every single case—that is, of its being one hundred per cent. efficient—is remote. It would, surely, be impossible to hypnotise every random audience that gathered, especially when highly sceptical Europeans on their guard against the power of suggestion were present.

On the other hand, I do think that the dancers themselves are in some sort of hypnotic trance. Their every action suggests it. The dull lethargy of the dancer whom I examined was to me typical of a hypnotised subject on the point of reawakening. The excitement of the preliminary ceremonies, the undoubtedly high hypnotic powers of the witch doctors, and the general attitude of utter dependence of the natives on these medicine-men all help to make the hypnotic state easy of attainment and lend weight to the theory.

But is hypnotism of the dancers sufficient to account for the fact that there are no physical signs of burning on the feet? He would be a bold man indeed who would give a definite negative in answer to that question. Let it be confessed that even today we do not know of what a hypnotised subject is capable. Certainly, hypnotic suggestion can banish pain. It is claimed, indeed, that even major operations can be carried out painlessly with no other anæsthetic than hypnotism. This claim was made very early in the history of modern hypnotism and it was afterwards rejected. Recently, however, there has been revived interest in hypnotic suggestion as an anæsthetic for surgical—and more particularly dental—operations, and it is clear that in certain circumstances at least it can be successfully employed. That hypnotism can go further and not merely inhibit pain but also prevent the appearance of physical injury is, of course, a very big step further on, and I do not wish to make it. But in the light of modern knowledge, it is not wholly incredible.

My own belief, then, for what it is worth, is that the dancers achieve this seemingly miraculous feat by reason of a combination of circumstances. In the first place, they are in a state of hypnotic frenzy (the word "trance" hardly seems applicable), and they have no fear of the fire or even any idea of fear. For the same reason, they are insensible to pain. This same cause may also explain the absence of burns in the same way as it accounts for many of the fantastic achievements of the Indian fakirs. But in addition there are purely physical causes at work. I do not, as I say, incline to the theory of movement so rapid that contact is not long enough for actual burning; but it may well be that the hypnotic state slows down the reactions, as it were, and makes the period of safe contact rather longer. There is also the undoubted fact that the uppermost surface of any burning material is also the coolest and that ash is a good insulator of heat. Finally, I feel that a native could submit, even in the absence of all these special circumstances, to brutal treatment of the feet that would cause gross injuries to a European's. It may be recalled that the *bastinado*, or beating on the soles of the feet, which so horrified early European visitors to the Near and Middle East, where it was practised, and was described as by them the zenith of barbaric torture, was almost certainly far more humane than our present-day prison floggings. It is only the booted races that have tender and sensitive feet.

All that, I am only too conscious, makes no great revelation, and may seem to many to be neither more nor less than dodging the issue—but I did not promise any sensational conclusions. Nor will it satisfy those who still cling to the nineteenth-century physicist's belief in complete mechanical explanations of everything and anything. Fire-walking, like so many other phenomena seen in the Pacific, is one of those things which, on the data now available, we can neither explain nor explain away. One grows used to such affairs in the Pacific, somewhat humiliating though it may be to pride in our twentieth-century knowledge, which, in spite of its ability to explain the workings of invisible atomic particles and the mechanics of nebulae millions of light-years away from us, fails so often to offer any convincing reason for a good many of the things that happen in primitive communities and are accepted by their inhabitants as the natural order.

Reflecting on this state of affairs, one recalls the theory sometimes put forward that for every new gain in knowledge there is a corresponding loss in older knowledge. But this is wading into troubled waters wherein the philosophers and epistemologists like to fish—waters that are best left to the wielders of those tireless rods.

On the voyage back—completed without disaster, despite our guide's warning to me about the dangers of depriving him of his tobacco—the party eagerly discussed what we had seen, and my opinion, as that of the sole representative of science on board, was invited. At that moment I was less able to offer any sort of explanation than I have been since. The exhibition had impressed me too deeply and was too fresh in my mind for me to rush in with the sort of glib brushing-asides that are the mark of the know-all. I was in a different—a very different—frame of mind from that in which I had made the outward trip. My scepticism had been completely exploded, and if I had not gone to the other extreme of credulous amazement, at any rate I had had a very striking reminder that not all knowledge reposes in the western world.

And there was one other aspect of the experience that puzzled me—something that had nothing to do with the actual performance but had seemed to me, on reflection, to need some explanation. How was it that, when so many white men had been refused, I was allowed, with comparatively little bother, to examine one of the ritual dancers? What story was it that our now taciturn guide had told so volubly to the native authorities?

I looked at him as he stood at the wheel, his eyes never leaving the bows, his face expressionless. He was the sort of man who looked capable of nothing—and everything; particularly did he look as though he would resent savagely any question into his actions or intrusion into whatever secret thoughts went on behind that mask he called his face. But I decided to risk it.

"Tell me," I said, "what did you tell those natives to induce them to let me examine the fire-walker?"

He did not reply at once, but the tobacco in his pipe glowed more redly in the bowl, as though in warning, as he pulled on it more strongly. Then, without so much as glancing in my direction, he nodded almost imperceptibly.

"Better not ask, doctor," he replied tersely. "You mightn't like it."

"Oh!" I exclaimed. This roused all my curiosity, and I was not to be denied. I pressed him—for some time unavailingly. For all his expression revealed, he might have been stone deaf.

Finally, he momentarily looked at me and for the first time—and the last, too—I saw a smile on his lips. It was no more than the suggestion of a smile, a mere relaxing of the lips, yet there could be no mistaking what it was.

"All right," he said gruffly. "You've asked for it. I told them," he went on, "that in your own country you were a very great medicine-man, and that you were friendly with some very powerful spirits, some of whom were accompanying you on your journey."

"I see," I said.

He nodded slightly. "Yes. I told 'em that if they refused the spirits would be very angry and might start eating up their own particular local brand."

"And they fell for that?" I asked. To me it was a striking commentary on the immense amount of work still to be done by educational bodies in the Pacific.

"Well," he drawled. "That was the line of sales talk. It made 'em sit up and take notice. But it wouldn't have been any good without the tobacco—which reminds me, doctor, that you're lucky for I've just about enough to see us through the reef."

I took the hint. As soon as we were ashore again I took him to the nearest store and bought him a quantity of tobacco that, to my uninformed eyes, looked big enough to provide for a minor military operation destined to last several months. He assured me, however, that I'd done no more than fix him up for the next fortnight. It had to be enough; there was no more in stock or I would gladly have bought him more. The experience had been cheap at the price.

It was, in fact, curious that wherever I went I seemed to be treated with special favours and respect. In the early days of my trip I had, in my ignorance, put it down to the fact that I was a British doctor, and that the natives were naturally honoured at being visited by such a one. There was no personal vanity in

this ; I believed then that the same treatment would have been accorded to any one of my colleagues in the profession.

That idea did not last very long. There are far more doctors and medical workers in the Pacific than I had imagined—though, Heaven knows, there are few enough in relation to the titanic task they have to perform. I should not like anyone to run away with the idea that the Pacific islanders enjoy a prodigality of medical attention denied to the average British citizen in these days of manpower shortage. Even today in England, a sufferer can get a doctor when one is needed ; many of the Pacific islands see a doctor only once in many months, and even at that there is no regularity about his calls. The point I wish to make is that in the Pacific islands European doctors (and I include in that description the very many devoted American medical men working in this area) may be rare birds, but they are nowadays by no means novelties, and their arrival is not hailed as a sensation by any of the islanders.

On the contrary, the regular medical worker in the islands counts on receiving at least as much obstruction and possibly hostility to his work as co-operation. He does not expect to be hailed with the words beloved of writers of sentimental novels, "Thank God you've come, doctor !" but is ready for argument, resistance, or just plain indifference. From many sources and from actual observation alike I learned that a doctor, as such, is not at all *persona grata* to the natives.

It would have been flattering, of course, to think that my reputation had preceded me, and that distance had lent such enchantment to the view that these simple people were anxious to welcome me as one of the Great Ones of the Earth. My self-esteem, however, whatever my friends may care to say, does not go to those lengths ; and in any event I might have been the most famous and skilful surgeon in the whole world without that fact being of the slightest importance to Pacific islanders. No ; there was some different explanation, for there could be no possible doubt at all that I did receive a remarkable welcome—indeed, it was often remarked upon by my guides and hosts.

In the end and after reflection based on what I had seen and heard—and still more upon discussion with those who had spent years in the Pacific, I came to the conclusion that the explanation

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was a more subtle and psychological one, with its roots in the age-old conflict between the black and the white, the old and the new.

The regular doctors in the area, whether they were actually government medical officers or workers for some medical mission or private service, represented the white man's authority. Often, indeed, they seemed only to come to impose some new indignity upon the population. Now it was inoculation for this or that epidemic ; now it was the destruction of some disease of parasite-infested hovel ; or again it was lectures, demonstrations, teachings, trying to make the native break the sanctified customs of centuries. And, whether coloured or white, the majority of men have a resentment towards authority, no matter how much that feeling may be masked.

Again, the white doctors, with their strange ideas, represented an active sector of the front in the war between the old and the new. The differences between the civilisation of the west and the primitive cultures of these peoples, most of them still in the animistic stage, is not one of degree but of an entirely contrasting mode of thought. Again let it be said, as so many authorities on the subject have pointed out, that if the premises of sympathetic magic and the rest are granted, the natives' system is rigidly logical—perhaps more so than any western religion or ideology. It is this ordered system, which to the native is unchallengeable, unalterable, and eternal, that the white doctors in particular are continually fighting ; they assert that drains are more important than devils, vaccination than voodoo. They are intruders into the most personal intimacies of the individual.

It was just because I was not a representative of this authority and struggle that I received the special favours I did. Here was a white doctor who, in his own country, could be bought (and perhaps bribed) in just the same way as their own medicine-men. He had command of all the powerful magics which the Government doctors used, but he did not insist on their use. On the contrary, it was clear that these magics were available to anyone who could pay the price for them. Unconsciously, at any rate, the natives, I think, found all this more easy of understanding than the activities of a Government medical service seeking to impose a new way of life and living upon them.

Here, I feel convinced, was the secret of the remarkable welcome I received and for the many flattering offers of patronage that were bestowed on me. Almost my first medical experience in the Pacific was, it will be recalled, followed by an invitation to accept service with a ruling chief. That was only the first of many. I have not recorded every one of the medical cases with which I was concerned in the Pacific, for this is not my casebook of the trip—in that sense, at any rate. But almost invariably whenever I was able to perform some service, no matter how slight, to some chief or other native of rank, it was followed by a suggestion that I should become that individual's personal medical attendant. With the offer went what were obviously stupendous and unheard of inducements—particularly in the number of girls and women I was offered. If I had accepted even one of these offers, I sometimes thought, I should have put Solomon himself in the shade, at any rate so far as the number of wives was concerned.

No doubt it would have been easy to ascribe these offers to admiration for my skill, but I refuse to think that is the whole reason, though I am vain enough to imagine that it was often a contributory factor. I showed these people little, if anything, that was new, for the doctors who work in these areas are well up-to-date, and if sometimes their methods seem a little crude that is not by choice but simply through lack of equipment and facilities and drugs and trained assistance. It would be ludicrous for me to claim or even to suggest privately to myself that I was the first doctor (in 1946?) to use an anæsthetic in the Pacific islands. Indeed, it would be more than ludicrous, for it would be a gratuitous insult and criminal slander on those untiring, patient and highly skilful doctors who constitute the medical services of the islands.

Behind these offers, I am sure, was the thought that possession of my talents would confer on my employer a new equality with the white man, a means to challenge the white man's authority. For no Government doctor could then come and order this and that when I was there to support my chief, as I would be bound to do. I should have become a medicine-man in a new sense—both from my own point of view and from that of the native. So far as the latter was concerned, I would provide a method of bringing

the new ideas on which the white man insisted into the general established pattern of native life.

There were many times when this eagerness to enrol me as surgeon-in-chief to some small village chieftain amused me greatly. The whole idea was in keeping with the grandiose conception these men have of their status and their function; and, as elsewhere in the world, the smaller the chief's actual authority, the greater his airs and graces.

On one occasion I had performed a small operation upon the chief himself. It was nothing at all much—merely the excision of a small benign growth in the hand, and I had carried it out with the aid of a local anæsthetic.

He and his suite were impressed deeply. They even expressed regret that the operation had lasted so short a time. After he had thanked me, and I had made the conventional gift for causing him pain, he had retired with his courtiers to a short distance, and they held an earnest discussion—of which I was obviously the subject.

A few minutes later the chief, looking extremely pompous and grand, returned—and there followed the offer, to which I was now accustomed, of a local appointment. With an ease that had come as the result of experience, I declined through my interpreter.

But this chief was not lightly to be put off. He insisted. He began to bribe me not only with what he had but with what his neighbours had also. From his own village I could have so many women—and he would bargain with the adjacent villages for more. He was so insistent on this glittering inducement that I fancied he would have been ready to carry off by force as many women as I might care to name—but for his rightful fear of lack of sympathy for such a course from the higher powers of the Colonial Service.

The idea was, by any standard, ridiculous. If the entire population of that small village fell ill at once it would not have overtaxed the resources of a general practitioner used to practice in a densely populated London suburb. I pointed out this to him, firmly but politely.

He stared at me with an expression of astonishment that needed no words and no translator.

"There is no need for people to be ill!" he exclaimed. "Many of those who fall ill do so by reason of devils they have offended and so deserve to die. On such, you would not be permitted to practise. But every day you could carry out this magic you have performed on me—the magic of cutting a man's hand so that he feels no pain and no blood flows"—I had used a tourniquet on him. "There would be many eager to have such a great magic performed on them—and if there were not, I would command them. For if I did not refuse such treatment, who are they to hang back?"

I had learned by now never to laugh outright at a native, no matter what the provocation; for many of their most laughable ideas are those which matter most to them and are deep-rooted in ancient tradition. Yet I confess that was a moment when I had the greatest difficulty in keeping myself under control.

He did not want a doctor on his staff. He was not interested in the health and welfare of his people. An operation was to him not something carried out after proper deliberation only for the purpose of alleviating pain or saving life, but an entertaining spectacle. In effect, I was being offered the post not of a surgeon but of a conjuror. No doubt, if I had accepted, I should have had to resign from the British Medical Association and join Equity instead.

For a minute or two I could not speak. The vistas this astonishing suggestion opened up filled me with wonder. After a little while, no doubt, he would have grown tired of simple incisions on the hand or arms, and he would have demanded procedures (or, as he would have termed them, entertainments) of increasing complexity. I had frightening visions of performing delicate and intricate abdominal operations on perfectly healthy subjects before a gaping and exclaiming audience of natives, not one of whom could have been induced to have adopted even the most rudimentary asepsis of washing his hands or wearing a mask. . . .

It was a bizarre and macabre notion that ran against the grain of everything in a doctor. Yet sometimes, in my cynical moments, I wonder if that is not an overstatement. I have known surgeons who, it seemed, could never exert their fullest talents unless they operated before an audience of admiring students;

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and the larger the audience, the better the operation. Perhaps to one of those the chief's proposal would not have appeared quite so fantastic as it did to me. I have no doubt whatever that the offer would be open to any competent surgeon who cared to apply, but for all that I do not think I am prepared to put interested inquirers in touch with the chief. That would be carrying my duty to my colleagues a little too far.

CHAPTER XI

Journey's Turn

It was a letter from some friends in Australia that reminded me how long I had spent among the islands of the Pacific. Until that came I had no real consciousness of the way in which the days had lengthened into weeks and the weeks into months. Time has no significance in that absorbing part of the world. There is always something fresh and novel to see and do ; new experiences wait for one at every turn. And since it is (if we are honest with ourselves) only necessity or boredom which makes us aware of the passage of time in the western world, the absence of these civilised Molochs means also the loss of a sense of duration. But they are gods that western man, at any rate, cannot long deny or forget. Sooner or later one or other of them will reach out his long, grasping arm and draw back the wanderer into his congregation. So it was with me. Left alone, I might have remained for years in the Pacific, ageing without being aware of it, losing all touch with the affairs of Britain and America and Europe. That letter was the messenger of necessity. I must press forward now to the turn of my journey—the Commonwealth of Australia, where I had engagements to fulfil before returning once more to the street of doctors that now, to me, was remote, unreal, and almost forgotten.

But it was not entirely harsh necessity. My wife and family were waiting for me in Australia, and I had no wish to lose them forever—to cast them away for the delights and curiosities of the Pacific islands. Perhaps, now I come to think of it, I was also feeling the power of the god of boredom. The programme of lectures and visits in the Commonwealth—a programme that I had gladly put from my thoughts these past few weeks—suddenly assumed a renewed and magnetic appeal. I realised that I had spent far too long away from what was, after all, my chief interest in life ; and though I had often thought, during my visits to the

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islands, that I could never escape the duties and privileges of my profession, I now felt that I had been far too long away from it. There is plenty of medical work to do in the islands—as I had discovered very fully for myself. But it is, in the main, emergency work, glorified first-aid and improvisation. I admire the men who do it ; they are among the finest members of the profession. Yet it demands a special temperament that is not mine. I think I should eventually go mad through being haunted all the while by the accusation and lament : “ How much better you could have treated that case if . . . ” If ! That is the curse, the eternal, almost crippling handicap of doctors in the islands. They could perform this or that operation *if* they had the proper means and qualified assistance. They could stamp out this or that disease, perform this or that operation *if* they had the proper means and *if* they could win full co-operation from the natives. They could conquer this or that epidemic *if* they could get adequate supplies of this or that drug. If ! It is a word that crops up again and again when one is talking to these doggedly optimistic doctors. Their practice is more like military medicine than civil. They are in a front line to which the supply services are in a state that no modern commander would tolerate for an instant.

This letter, this messenger from the civilised world, threw all things into a new relief for me. I saw the crudities—the brave, amazingly ingenious crudities—of Pacific medical work ; and my thoughts turned to the blitz in England during the war, when I was an Emergency Medical Service surgeon. How often during the darkest days of the attack on London I had been almost reduced to tears by the pathetic caricature of surgery we sometimes had to perform when the line of casualties seemed never ending, and my greatest ambition was—no, not to escape from surgery altogether, but to be free once more to carry out an operation in the way it should be done. My sympathy and understanding go out to these magnificent men and women who keep the flag of modern medicine flying among the myriad Pacific islands. I salute them—proudly, because they reveal the highest virtues of the profession to which I belong ; and humbly, because they have a fortitude and a faith quite beyond my grasp.

The very day on which I had received that letter I had been planning a fresh trip to a group of remote islands, where strange,

primitive customs were said still to flourish, unspoilt by the white man's coming. In my determination to leave nothing unseen, I had also been playing with the idea of a visit to the Trobriand Islands, which the late Professor Malinowski's books had made so familiar to me. At a flash all these, as well as a hundred less grandiose schemes, seemed of no account, and whereas I had before been prepared to spend the rest of my life beneath the skies of the Pacific, now my most pressing wish was to escape from the islands in the shortest space of time. I am not one of those people who enjoy the charms of anticipation. If my mind is made up I want the thing done at once, and have no patience to contemplate the coming fulfilment at leisure.

In the airline offices I nearly lost my temper. There was, they told me, no plane for Australia till three days ahead. It was preposterous, I replied. Here was I with urgent business in Australia and that was the best they could do. It was useless to remind me that there had been a plane the previous day and that I should have taken that; the previous day belonged to a closed chapter of my life. Equally vain was it for some acquaintances to point out that in the old days I might have had to wait weeks or months for a schooner to take me to Australia, and that it would probably have pursued a circuitous route so that I might not have reached my destination for a long time, perhaps months.

These arguments, most of them ironical, did not interest me. It was true that only the day before I had had no thought of pushing on to Australia, and the goings and comings of airliners had been of no account to me. Equally insignificant was the transport of the "good old days." I felt that if one lived in a world in which there were airways, they ought to provide the service one needed when one wanted it. A three days' wait was preposterous.

My packing still had to be done. Farewells to the many friends I had made had to be said. By the time these duties had been discharged, the period of waiting was almost over. In fact, the sound of the flying-boat engines as the plane approached the island took me by surprise. As I watched her taxi to the moorings I experienced some of the sensations I imagine shipwrecked sailors must feel when they see the rescue boat coming in across the surf.

Picking up my bag I hurried to the airways office, though I

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knew the plane was not resuming her journey for some hours. The place, which was usually quiet and orderly as efficient places usually are, was in a most exceptional state of turmoil. It was clear something out of the way had happened; and, as I drew near enough to the offices for me to be recognised, a messenger came running towards me.

"Oh, doctor!" he said breathlessly. "We were going to send for you. Can you come up to the office at once?"

"I'm on my way already," I replied. "What's the trouble?"

"It's one of the passengers on the boat," he exclaimed, still struggling to get his breath, for he had run towards me as though trying to outdo a fire-engine. "He's been taken ill and the manager wants you to examine him."

"But I'm not the only doctor here," I retorted, a little shortly. After all, I was supposed to be on holiday, and there were several very competent doctors with their headquarters on the island.

"Yes, sir," he said vaguely. "But here's the manager."

While we had been talking we had arrived at the offices, and the airline local manager—a brisk-mannered man who, I think, had been a pilot in the 1914-18 war—bustled towards me.

"You've got trouble?" I said when he approached me.

He nodded. "Yes," he said. "Do you think you could examine the passenger for me?"

"But why?" I returned. "You've your own doctor, haven't you? Dr. Carter's retained by your people to look after passengers and crews, isn't he?"

The manager nodded. "Yes, doctor," he replied. "Dr. Carter would like your opinion—he's seen the patient. And the patient himself—his name is William Hathoe, and he comes from London—would like you to see him."

"Oh, very well," I said, none too pleased. My own desire at that moment was to be on board the flying-boat.

I followed him into his small private office, where a middle-aged man, his face drawn and white with pain, was lying on a folding bed that had been erected for him. Dr. Carter came towards me.

"There's no doubt in my mind," he said, "but I'd like your confirmation. Besides, the patient has heard of you in London and he wants you to take the case, if you can."

"What is it?" I asked.

"Appendicitis," Carter replied briefly.

No. There was no doubt at all about it. Not only was it appendicitis; it was a very acute case and an immediate operation was necessary. Hathoe himself realised as much, and he implored me to take charge of him.

"You operated on my sister," he managed to whisper in a strained tone. "Mrs. Bannister. That was an appendix, too. Do you remember?"

I remembered vaguely, though I was cursing those fates that never left me in peace for long. That the brother of a patient of mine should choose to have appendicitis in these circumstances and expect me to operate on him in the south Pacific was too much to be believed. Yet here it was.

"You will, won't you?" he begged.

"Just a moment," I said, turning to the door. Outside I found the manager, looking worried and harassed.

"Well, doctor?" he asked. "This is a nuisance. You see, Mr. Hathoe is a V.I.P., and there'll be all sorts of reports to make about this."

"That doesn't interest me," I returned, rather shortly. "He's asked me to operate—and it'll have to be done, though I think Dr. Carter could do it perfectly efficiently. But I can't very well refuse. I'll do it on one condition."

"Yes?" he said, obviously cursing me for adding another item to the heavy burden he already bore.

"That flying-boat waits here till I'm ready to join it," I said. His eyes opened in surprise.

"But, doctor, that's impossible!" he exclaimed. "She's behind on her schedule now and——"

"I don't care about that," I retorted. "Those are my terms. If the boat can't wait, then I refuse the case. Well?"

He did not reply at once. I had clearly set him a difficult problem. He could see I was in dead earnest, and he also knew that, as a V.I.P. was concerned, there might be unwelcome inquiries if the truth came out. Finally, he nodded limply.

"O.K.," he said wearily. "I'll hold up the boat for you."

Having won my point, I felt a little better. The thought that the flying-boat, for which, as it seemed to me, I had waited

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half a lifetime, might go without me had been a terrible torture. I did not mind how late it might be in arriving, so long as I was among the passengers. This was one of those curious psychological twists for which all our modern knowledge provides no complete or satisfying explanation. I was told that another aeroplane, bound for Australia, was due in another two days—and I found myself reflecting that I did not care if it left before my flying-boat which symbolised for me all my new-found ambition to be in Australia.

There was a small hospital available on the island, and here the patient was conveyed on a stretcher, borne by natives. It was, to my eyes, a curious procession with a touch of the macabre about it, for the boys looked as though they were carrying a corpse to a funeral yet at the same time might break into song and dance at any moment. Dr. Carter had gone on ahead to prepare for the operation, and, by the time I had rescued my instruments from my luggage and covered the short distance to the hospital, he was quite ready.

"I'm glad you were here," he remarked. "Believe it or not, it's so long since I operated that I'd've been scared stiff if I'd had to do it."

"Nonsense!" I returned. "An appendix isn't surgery—it's just simple plumbing."

"And that's about what I should do on my own," he commented with a chuckle.

Whatever his skill or lack of it in surgery might be, he proved a very capable assistant. The intervention presented no unsuspected surprises, and everything went through smoothly. The patient, though by no means in the first flush of youth, was fit and healthy, and I saw no reason at all for subsequent complications. Accordingly, when I had made quite sure that all was normal, I decided to leave the patient in Carter's very able hands. Really, there was little enough reason for all the fuss that was being made.

"That's O.K. by me," he said, when I explained my ideas to him. "But if there should be any complications I'll radio the plane and have it brought back here."

"If you do," I replied darkly, "I'll put you on the table—and you won't need any post-operative treatment."

He chuckled and turned to follow me to the airways office.

For the second time my arrival seemed to be an event of importance, but this time my appearance was greeted with relief instead of anxiety. The manager looked surprised to see me.

"All set so soon?" he asked. "I didn't expect you'd be so quick."

"It was all quite straightforward," I replied, "and I shan't have to worry any more about the patient with Dr. Carter about the place." I shot a quick glance at Carter, "As a matter of fact, he could have performed the operation himself if he hadn't been so keen on holding me up."

"Maybe," said the manager shortly. "That's something for you medical blokes to have out between you—and there won't be time now because I'm shooting that boat off just as soon as you can get on board." He shrugged. "I've had a sticky time, what with irate passengers and inquiries from Australian terminal asking what the hold-up's about. The launch is waiting, doctor," he added.

"The faster it moves, the better I shall be pleased," I commented, hurrying along in his wake.

Apparently the pilot and crew were already on board, standing by for my arrival. I was almost hurled into the plane, but I did not care. The sooner we were airborne the better. If there had not been all this absurd ado about an appendicectomy, I should have been well on my way to Australia by now. But as I settled in my seat, the thought struck me that it had only been a few hours' delay, which was a small matter in comparison with the weeks I had spent in dodging about the islands. That, I think, was the first indication of my return to a normal and rational frame of mind to put things in their proper perspective.

For some reason, which perhaps highly experienced air-travellers can explain, travel by flying-boat always seems to be inordinately slow. I know, of course, that the flying-boats in use on the airways today are generally not so fast as the landplanes, but my reaction is not due to anything that can be measured by an airspeed indicator. When I go by flying-boat I always have the same sensation of frustration as I experience when I am caught in a traffic jam in my car; the idea

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grows on me that I shall never reach journey's end. So it was a little unfortunate that I had to cover the final lap to Australia by this means of transport ; there was nothing at all to calm my impatience. Moralists may say that was a good thing for me, since it gave me a chance to overcome emotion by reason. Well, that may be so, but let the moralists look down their noses as much as they like for I confess that I made little use of the chance.

Psychologically, it was a nightmare journey. Again and again I wanted to walk into the pilot's cockpit in the front of the machine and shout to him to hurry—hurry. After all, the plane had lost valuable time and was well behind her schedule. Yet I was convinced that the pilot, out of pure spite for me having upset the arrangements of the airline, was flying on half throttle or less. We seemed to be making no progress at all . . . or that was the impression I formed.

For that reason—my obsession with the need for haste—I noticed very little of the details of the journey. The steward brought eatables from time to time, but I consumed them mechanically and almost unconsciously. If he had set chicken meal and water in front of me, I do not think I should have noticed that it was not chicken and champagne—and that is a very unusual state of affairs with me. Nor did I observe the sights over which we passed, though, as I expect as I have already shown in these pages, I am an avid sightseer. True, I glanced automatically out of the portholes when the steward or a fellow passenger drew general attention to some point of interest, but my mind registered little or nothing.

That is why I shall not add to the hundreds of glowing eulogies and word pictures that the world possesses of the Great Barrier Reef. I saw it—yes ; I can remember its being pointed out by the steward and hailed with the wonder it deserves from the other passengers—even those who had seen it before. And I believe the pilot had lost height to enable us to get a better view. That is all I can recall—apart from the disappointment, later, when realisation of what I had missed came to me. I was to see it and admire it later, but not for me was the thrill of seeing it for the first time as the promise and fulfilment of the manifold beauties of Australia. Perhaps I am the first

traveller to pass that way to whom the Great Barrier Reef was almost nothing. It is a distinction with which I would rather dispense, for truly I believe that I lost one of the greatest of all aesthetic thrills that the Pacific has to offer.

What mattered more to me then was that, not long afterwards, I set foot on Australian soil for the first time. For the first time, too, I experienced the kind of welcome that the Australian gives to the visitor on his own land—a welcome that is not effusive in the American way, but has a warmth and depth that brings a peculiar satisfaction to the mind and heart.

It seems to say to you: "Welcome to Australia! If you're ready to like us and take to our ways we're more than ready to like you." And it has in it, too, a faint note of warning: "But heaven help you if you start putting on the high hat because you come from Europe." There are some who see in that attitude a hint of aggressiveness; but, after getting to know Australians, I am firmly convinced that it is not so. All that it implies is that the Australian is proud of his country and of its achievements; it is the understandable and praiseworthy attitude of the young nation that has found itself and is not merely determined to, but able to, stand on its own feet, without fear or favour of any people in the world. It is a point of view to admire and respect.

But Australia and Australians provide too vast and absorbing a topic to deal with in a few pages. Later I shall devote a whole book to those subjects which cannot be treated as a sort of appendage to anecdotes of experiences among South Sea islanders. The whole scale is different. In the Pacific islands there is a war of cultures; the old and the new jostle each other, and the white man's task seems to be confined to trying to make the two fit together. Australia is a vast country that white men have built and are building, and the part of the aborigines is negligible. Perhaps the best way to put it is to say that the whole outlook and atmosphere in the islands is colonial, with the white man the overlord of the native peoples. Australia is a civilised, progressive country, taking its place among the world's greatest. As well include a chapter on Australia in this book as one on the United States in a volume on the smaller

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West Island group. I respect Australia and the Australians too much to be guilty of so gross a discourtesy.

Here, then, I will merely summarise events in Australia, making them seem no more than a bridge between the outward and the homeward phases of my journey—which is a topsy-turvy thing to do, for my goal had always been Australia, and my visit there was the most important event of the trip—also, I think, one of the most important and certainly one of the most interesting events in my life.

A well-filled programme was ahead of me in the Commonwealth, but the first and most pressing item was to rejoin my family. It threw a vivid light on the time I had spent in my wanderings to realise that though I had flown all the way, with the exception of the Atlantic crossing, they, travelling by boat, had arrived several weeks before I did. In order to catch up on some of the time I had lost I decided to leave the flying-boat and fly direct to Sydney by landplane service, which was faster and also, I think, more comfortable. I think I have some sort of odd phobia about flying-boats. In the bar of the hotel, over a farewell drink, I poked a little mild fun at the pilot of the flying-boat.

"You'll be able to take your own leisurely course," I remarked, "without the thought that you've a passenger on board who's fretting all the time about your lack of speed. By the way," I added, "I thought you had time to make up. Why did you dawdle so on the crossing?"

He crinkled his brows and looked at me in a manner that was half puzzled and half resentful.

"Dawdled?" he repeated, as though he was not sure he had heard aright. "*Dawdled?*" And then he stared in blank astonishment. He tapped his second pilot on the shoulder. "Did you hear what the doc. says?" he demanded incredulously. "He must be plain bats—that's all about it." He turned again to me. "Do you realise, doc., that we got more out of that old kite on that trip than we've ever got before, and it's logged as the fastest flying-boat crossing yet?"

"I didn't know," I replied. "I congratulate you. But to me it seemed as though we'd never make landfall."

He nodded, still a little stunned at my statements.

"I'm sorry," I went on, for I thought he was really hurt. "Flying-boats always seem slow to me. I thought you were flying on half throttle."

He smiled rather weakly. "O.K., doc.," he said. "We can take it. But we did think we were doing you a good turn, seeing how impatient you were to get here. Never mind." He set down his empty glass. "You're going to have one on me just to show I still love you."

I left the next day. Sightseeing was far from my mind. There would be plenty of time for that later—and in the company of real Australians—my wife's family—who would show me round. And when at last I arrived at Sydney I felt suddenly very tired as though nature was demanding a price for all my impatience and my ceaseless journeying over the past few weeks.

It was grand to be reunited with my wife and the two children—who seemed to have grown and matured incredibly during the short time since I had seen them. No doubt it was the glorious Australian climate and the good Australian food, which to those who come from a "Stracheyised" Britain is like the milk and honey must have been to the ancient Israelites.

An elaborate programme of sightseeing and amusement, on top of the professional engagements I had, had been prepared for me. It was set before me for approval.

"That's fine," I said. "But we won't start for a whole month. I want nothing more in the world than a complete rest."

Rest I had—rest, and food that seems to me the most marvellous I have ever tasted. For here were fresh fruits in abundance—not only those I knew but also many strange and exotic varieties. There was wine—good, invigorating wine which proved that Australia can compete with the best vineyards in the world; and one did not have to be a multi-millionaire to be able to afford a couple of bottles or more a day. Above all, there was the sunshine. It was sunshine one could enjoy with utter relaxation and without any sort of anxiety; for even on a perfect summer's day in England one always has a feeling of insecurity and one's eyes are always being lifted to the heavens for the first signs of the cloud no bigger than a man's hand. In Australia this sunshine, unbroken, continuous, is the normal state

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of affairs, and, curiously to anyone who has lived in England, it is rain which is looked forward to eagerly.

That period of doing nothing, relieved of all cares, was for me the most wonderful tonic in the world. I revelled in it for a whole month—and then the cure was complete. My mood changed abruptly, and I was filled with an urge to begin my professional tour.

I was to lecture in the most important towns of the Commonwealth and to meet the leaders of the medical profession there. My subject was plastic surgery and its use during the war. Everywhere I went I was royally received, and what I had to say was not only listened to with deep attention but was applauded with an enthusiasm that at first was a little startling. In this way I visited Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and Brisbane—and in the last-named city I was flattered to receive an offer by the State Government to remain as surgeon and teacher in the University.

Those were full weeks—weeks in which almost every day brought something interesting, exciting and amusing. Recalling them, I am sorely tempted to say more of them, but that is better left until there is the opportunity to do them full justice. It was not all work. There was plenty of play; there were many strange sights to see; and everywhere I went I received a welcome the memory of which remains warm and glowing even though many of the actual details of this or that experience tend to grow a little dim.

And so at last my thoughts began to turn towards home. Letters and cables reached me from London reminding of this or that; and I had already been away from England much longer than I had planned or expected.

Now it is one thing to decide to return to England—quite another to make arrangements for it, even when one has good and influential friends to help. I had begun this round-the-world trip under difficulties, but they seemed almost negligible in comparison with the problem of booking a passage on the air service to Europe.

Australia, it appears, is a land rich in everything—including Superlatively Important Persons desiring to travel to Great Britain. And these S.I.P.s, beside whom V.I.P.s are mere small

fry, are capricious and—may I say it?—avaricious. They decide overnight to fly to England—and their desires are law. Time and again all my arrangements appeared to be made. My bags were packed. My documents reposed safely in my pockets. And then, at the eleventh hour, and sometimes at the fifty-ninth minute thereof, I would receive an urgent notice of cancellation. The place allotted to me was needed by one of these S.I.P.s. This happened so often that I began to suspect a psychological kink in these sublime beings. It occurred to me that they must go through the passenger lists and, finding a name in it not of their circle, they forthwith requisition the unfortunate traveller's reservation. Since much the same thing was happening at about the same time in England with S.I.P.s flying to Australia, it looks as though there is a constant interchange of notabilities between the two countries. There is, of course, another aspect of it; it may be that these S.I.P.s have found in a life of continuous travel between England and Australia a solution for the housing problem in England, for while a seat on an air-liner is theirs for the asking, not even they can count on finding even a room in London or near it.

In the end, patience, that virtue which is so much a burden to me, was rewarded. I was told that a definite reservation had been made for me, and further that I could count upon it absolutely; there would be no cancellation.

The certainty of all this puzzled me. I could not understand how anyone, let alone an air-line office, could be so sure that no S.I.P.s would intervene to make me again a displaced person. At my final visit to the office the mystery was explained. I had looked forward to flying home in speed and comfort on a Lancastrian. For once, I had been telling myself, I would go straight to my destination, without delays. And then I was told my reservation was in a flying-boat.

A flying-boat. My heart sank. I only hoped it would not have the same pilot as had ferried me across the last leg to Australia.

CHAPTER XII

Trouble Over the Indies

There was a very curious difference in the frame of mind in which I started this homeward journey from that in which I had set out for the Pacific islands from America. Then, I had been in search of adventure, sensation and novelty. I was on the look-out for the unusual and the bizarre and, looking back on that section of my trip, I do not think I can say I was at all disappointed. This homeward flight, however, had quite another atmosphere. It was a return to reality. I was putting the realms of romance behind me and each day, each hour, would bring me so much nearer the conventional affairs of everyday life. I did not altogether regret it. Adventure, like wine, is best taken in strictly limited quantities ; so, it stimulates and enchants. But unrestrained indulgence in alcohol or adventure is likely to befuddle a man and, in the end, reduce his vitality to the lowest ebb.

I glanced round the cabin. All the passengers on this section were men—one or two officers in uniform and some others who looked like officials. My next-seat neighbour was of a different type : he had the tell-tale complexion and skin texture of a man who has spent many years in the tropics, and he looked like one who was used to taking decisions. Perhaps he was a planter, a trader, an engineer.

At first he did not seem inclined for conversation. He looked through some books he had brought with him, but they gave no clue to his way of life, for they were current novels and memoirs, such as anyone might get in the month's parcel from the library. At last he laid his books aside and stared abstractedly out of the porthole. Then he slowly turned towards me and glanced at me with keen, grey eyes.

"So we're off again," he remarked with an air of resignation. "Well, I suppose I should be used to it, but to tell you the truth I never feel safe on this trip till we've left Cairo behind."

"I beg your pardon?" I said in surprise. I had not expected a remark of that kind.

He nodded. "Trouble," he jerked. "Trouble everywhere. Remember that old film, *They Gave Him a Gun*? The one that showed how American boys were taught to handle guns during the 1914 war and then naturally became gangsters during the depression."

"Yes, I think I remember it," I said, wondering what on earth Hollywood films had to do with homeward flights to England and their alleged dangers.

"That's what it's like in these parts today," he went on. "I often think of it that way. The white man's given the natives guns—and now they're using 'em."

"But surely . . ." I protested.

He nodded. "Oh, yes. The citizen of the British Empire is safe anywhere." He spoke sarcastically. "Believe me, that doesn't cut any ice today. Not a bit to put in a cocktail. If your skin's white, your heart's black—that's the natives' motto today—and he's inclined to shoot first and find out about you afterwards, if he troubles to do so at all."

"You know this part of the world well then?" I asked, as much to find out who and what this surprising man was as to discover whether he was merely "shooting his mouth off" as the Americans say, or talking from experience.

He nodded sharply. "Yes. My name's Cranmer, by the way. I'm a civil engineer, and I've been pushing around the Far East ever since I finished my articles getting on for thirty years ago." He smiled quickly. "I know what you're getting at. Yes, I know what I'm talking about."

"You must do."

He was silent for a little while and then he faced me again.

"I sometimes think I'm dreaming, the change that's come over things out here," he said. "When I first came out East a white man was a white man—and he was definitely on top everywhere. There were degrees in white men, of course—your German wasn't ranked as high as an Englishman, and he, perhaps, was a little less than a Dutchman. But anyone with a white skin was safe. The johnnies knew that if a white

man got hurt or disappeared, things started getting tough, and men with rifles and machine-guns and a nice strong hempen rope in the background turned up to look into things. But now . . .” He shrugged expressively.

“But,” I said, more to continue an argument than for any other reason, “do you think that’s how things should be? Don’t you think the native peoples should learn to look after themselves in their own lands?”

“The old questions!” he said, with a slight snort. “If you want my answer I’d say as a general principle, as an ideal—yes, I do think the natives should learn to look after themselves. But it’s not practical politics — yet. It won’t be for donkey’s years and maybe it never will be. I don’t know. They tell me you’re a doctor”—I suppose he’d consulted the passenger list—“and you should know more about the human being’s capacity for mental growth than I do.”

“I believe the mental gulf between the native and the white man is much less than most people believe.” I observed. “Why isn’t it practical politics?”

“Listen,” he replied, leaning forward earnestly. “I’m no communist—far from it; I hate the whole idea of it. But I’ve formed that conclusion from studying the thing up and not from prejudice. I’ve read a whole heap of books. There’s a hell of a lot of rot in them, but Lenin did say one or two things that were pretty near the mark. He said somewhere something to the effect that education must come before self-government. That’s why he put so much emphasis on education in the early days of Soviet Russia. Well, there you have it. I’m not being a True Blue flag-wagger. I’m giving you the reason from the mouth of the great red revolutionary himself—the god of the anti-imperialists.”

“You think that the natives aren’t ready yet?”

“Yet?” he exclaimed. “I doubt whether they ever will be. You don’t turn a native into a civilised being by giving him a pair of pants to wear and seeing that he goes to church every Sunday. It’ll take generations for them to grow out of the savage stage. Of course, there are lots of ’em who’ve been to Europe and America. They’ve been to universities and got degrees and all that sort of thing. But they’re only a minority,

and they've only learnt from the white man so that they can turn the white man's knowledge against himself."

"That's going a bit far, isn't it?" I protested. He was interesting me deeply.

"Is it? Yes, I admit it's our fault to some extent. We've shown 'em how to grab and exploit and use cheap labour for big profits. The educated natives see in that a good thing. Oh, yes, in public speeches it's a bad thing—oppression and all that. But only if the exploiter is the white man. That's the point. Let the natives rule themselves—which means hand 'em over to the minority who've picked up a veneer of western knowledge—and they'll be exploited and slave-driven as they never were before."

There was nothing new in these arguments, of course. I had heard them often before—but usually from Imperialists of the old school, holding forth from the comfortable depths of a club armchair. They sounded different from this man, who so obviously spoke from experience and deep conviction based on practical knowledge. Yet he did not convince me of the whole truth of his thesis, for there are some things in which practical knowledge is not always the soundest guide. The practical man all too often sees matters entirely from his own viewpoint which is that of getting the job done; and he resists all change. A job is better done as it has always been done. The sharp conflicts between the practical, rule-of-thumb worker and the theorist trying to introduce some new departure as the result of independent investigation are not confined wholly to the realms of science and its offshoots.

"Surely," I asked, trying to keep him going—for he showed some signs of retiring into himself again—"surely you don't assert that things should be left as they are and that there's no room for improvement?"

He shook his head. "I've already said so," he replied, brusquely. "But there's too much loose thinking about this subject all round—as much on our side as on the natives'. Oh, I know it sounds very fine and just that the people should have what's called their 'own country.' That's exactly where I disagree with it all."

"What exactly do you mean by that?" He was beginning

to get quite excited—in a restrained sort of way, if the paradox will be allowed.

“That’s just sentimental eyewash,” he continued. “They had their own countries for centuries—and what did they make of them? What they’re after today—or, rather, what a small minority of westernised natives are after—is not *their* countries, but the countries we’ve created. Did they make the railways or sink the oil wells? Did they know how to make and use rubber? Did they do anything about building roads or setting up schools and hospitals? No, of course not. All that is the white man’s work, and now it’s pretty well done and some of the natives have learnt what the Yanks call the ‘know-how,’ they just want to take it away from the people who made them. And the ironic thing is that they make their claims in languages they’ve learnt in Europe—principally English—because their own aren’t equal to it.”

“It’s an interesting point of view,” I commented.

“Interesting?” He snorted very loudly, so that the other passengers looked round in surprise. “It happens to be true, and for once the truth is interesting. No. If they want their own countries, then let them have them, but first let the white man take away all that’s built—the railways and roads and hospitals and oil wells and rubber plantations and all the rest. If they can, let ’em build it all from nothing as we did. They can’t have it both ways. That’s just common-sense and fair play.”

“Fair play? Do you really think so?”

“What else is there to think?” he demanded. He was quite heated now. “We’ve slaved and worked in terrible climates—yes, for our own profits, I know, but also for the benefit of the natives. We’ve struggled against ignorance and barbarism and God knows what and we’ve met with resistance at almost every step. We’ve let their best men share the education we give to our own children at the highest level—the varsities and the hospital schools and so on. What they want now is to take all this for nothing. They’re like people who don’t think they should pay for their own schooling.”

“I don’t suppose they look at it in that way,” I remarked.

“No, they don’t—simply because the natives’ idea of justice

and a fair deal isn't the same as the white man's and probably never will be. That is one of the gulfs that may never be bridged. You can't wipe out a way of thought and a habit of life that's got a tradition of centuries behind it. All you can do is to put a top dressing on it. That's what the educated native is today. On the surface there are the familiar flowers of our own gardens, but underneath is the same old tropical soil—and in the end the flowers'll run to weeds and decline."

I was surprised to hear this slight from his lips, and he saw I was a little astonished.

"You have a bad effect on me, doctor," he remarked with a wry smile. "I don't usually run to fancy bits like that, and I'm rather surprised I'm capable of it. And to tell the truth I don't usually shoot my mouth off in this way to people I've only just met. I only hope I haven't said too much and shocked you."

I shook my head and hastened to reassure him. "Not a bit," I said. "You've been extremely interesting and given me a fresh angle on the native problem. The thing seems to me, though, that the trouble's started and there's no going back now, whether the end in view is right or wrong."

He nodded soberly. "That's true—that's very true," he said. "There lies the tragedy of it all, as I see it. But don't go taking what I've said as the last word of it all. I know there's another side—and well, perhaps I'm not entirely unbiased."

"Oh?" I interjected, trying to get him to amplify that hint of some personal experience at the back of his views.

"No," he said in a low voice. "You see, I've suffered from this westernisation and so perhaps I'm inclined to interpolate beyond the end of the curve." That was an expression only an engineer could use, I thought—an engineer or a mathematician, and I am neither; but I managed to see his meaning. "I suppose sometimes I take my own case, see there are others like it, and so generalise from a few particular cases. Well, I'm not the only one in the world who indulges in that particular logical fallacy. I often think it's the root of all politics."

"Politics aren't exactly an exact science," I remarked.

"No," he agreed. "Far from it. If you or I did our jobs with as little efficiency as most politicians did theirs, we'd be out

on our necks in no time. But I was trying to tell you about my own case—if you're interested," he added.

"I am—very much," I returned.

"Quite simple, but I think it explains my point of view," he observed. "I told you I've spent the whole of my professional existence in this part of the world. I've done some pretty sizeable jobs in my time—and, well, some of them seem well worth while to me. What I'm thinking of now is the railway and, after that, the road we built through part of the Straits Settlement years ago. It was a whale of a job. I began as assistant to the resident—a junior assistant at that. The job and the climate killed him, and then it killed his chief assistant, so in the end, while I was still a bit of a kid, I found myself in charge of the lot. We sweated blood on that contract," he went on, looking straight ahead of him at his lean, sinewy hands, as though the scenes were being conjured up in his mind's eye. "The toughest job I've ever been on. Once a big-wig came out from England and told me he was going to recommend we abandon it as hopeless, and it took me a couple of days to argue him out of it. We just couldn't give up then."

He was silent. I did not press him, for I understood that he was reliving memories of the greatest significance to him.

At last he gave a low chuckle. "That shows how green I was," he remarked. "Nowadays I'd be too conventional to attempt to bully a big shot out of a decision. Anyway, I won—and in the end we got the job through, eighteen months over schedule. I'm afraid this is going to develop into a sort of family history," he added apologetically, "perhaps I'd better shut up."

"Please don't," I said quickly. "I like family histories. You see, I'm a doctor—and mankind is very much a proper study to a doctor."

"O.K.," he said tersely. "Well, the operating company offered me the job of chief engineer and manager to the new line, and I simply jumped at it. I'd built the show, and it had come to be my particular pet ewe lamb. In some ways I think getting the line going was a tougher job than building it. There was native labour trouble—there always is—and it was hell trying to get the boys to see things in the right light. So long as they polished the brasswork and spruced up the paint on a loco

they didn't care about the guts. That was their frame of mind. But in the end we got them thinking on proper lines, and I think ours was one of the most efficient lines, in the engineering sense, anywhere in the Settlements. I was more than proud of it. I felt I was gaffer of a bunch of real engineers. Visiting engineers were often a bit surprised at the way the boys ran things."

"It sounds like a good show."

"I think I can agree without being swollen headed," he remarked. "Then someone with an Idea came along—a politician or something. This was the natives' country—not ours—and they were so good that they thought to run the show themselves. I received all sorts of official letters of congratulation for what I'd done, and I was offered an official Government job as director of native instruction in engineering somewhere—which I turned down flat. I argued, pleaded and protested, but it was no go. I was cleared out and one of my boys was put in my place. Not a white man was left on the outfit."

"And then?" I asked, though I guessed what was coming.

"Then it happened," he said. "The inevitable. The line just went to bits. The trains ran hours late if they ran at all. Locos broke down. The track fell to pieces and the rolling-stock collapsed under load. A bridge buckled up and killed ten people when a train was going over it. There was an inquiry and blame was put not on their Harry Tate maintenance, if you please, as it should have been, but on the contractors, who, the inspector said, hadn't exercised proper supervision of labour and materials. Yes—after the hell we went through to put it up at all," he commented bitterly.

"Is that all?" I asked softly when he remained silent.

"Isn't it enough?" he returned ruefully. "I should think so. But my point is that that's what will happen everywhere when the white man clears out. It may not matter in the long run. But when you've spent your whole life tearing your guts out to get things shipshape you don't like to see it all go to pot just for the sake of sloppy sentiment about giving people their own countries. They're not their own. That railway wasn't theirs and never will be, and they don't know how to use it now they've got it. That's the moral."

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He paused and transferred his gaze to the porthole. There was nothing but the sea beneath. Slowly he turned to me again.

"I don't claim that my case is unique or even a flagrant example," he remarked. "It's happening everywhere throughout the Far East. But you can see why I'm biased a little and why all this talk about giving the natives their own and not treating them as inferior races makes me laugh one minute and want to weep the next. It's just plain, sloppy sentiment. Of course they're inferior—just as children are inferior to adults. They've got to grow up. It doesn't do to go giving a kid the freedom and responsibility of an adult till he's ready to take it, and that goes for these native peoples as well."

Again he paused, and I did not know what to say.

"Still," he said with a resigned air after a little while, "you're right when you say things can't be altered. The change is being made, and there's nothing I can do about it. I forget how many times I've made this trip by sea or air, but it must add up to a nice little total, and I wouldn't be sorry to have all the money that's been spent on my passage tickets in the course of my life. But it's the last time."

"The last time?" I asked in surprise.

He nodded slowly. "Yes. I've turned it in for keeps now. They tell me England's in a hell of a mess—you can't eat and you can't get this and that and we might have lost the war instead of won it, but I'm staying there. I'm dropping off in India to say goodbye to some old friends—though I expect they'll be back with me in England soon enough now—and then I'm through."

I sat thinking for a while. Was his viewpoint right or was he that most pathetic figure of all—a man who has played an important part in a phase of development and cannot adapt himself to new and different conditions, even though they are largely the product of his own work? Perhaps there was a little of both in it.

His conversation interested me intensely. I had come out to Australia by the easy path—the route of the sightseer and pleasure-seeker, and I had been content to find entertainment and enjoyment wherever I could. But this man had shown me there was another side to the East. I was being brought up

against one of the greatest of all problems in the world today : the problem of the future of the native peoples hitherto dependent on the white man. It was something to which I proposed to pay more attention on my way home.

It was curious that almost from the moment of starting that homeward flight this chance-met engineer should have sounded that particular keynote. For I need not have resolved to try to look into the problem. It was to be brought very forcibly to my notice all the way, though beyond the dark warnings of my engineer acquaintance there was little enough to suggest it in the quiet atmosphere of the flying-boat's cabin as she forged her way ahead smoothly and steadily over the sea.

There were plenty of places on the route homeward that should have aroused my romantic imagination and set my restless soul in search of new adventure. But the engineer's conversation had, for the moment at least, thrown a shadow over the golden glamour that invested such names as Java, Burma and the Indies. The headhunters of Java, the fantastic temples of Burma, and its no less fabulous ruby mines, the magnificence that is India—these were the stuff of legend now, and a new reality, dark and problematical, lay over them.

As if to comment on this sombre thought, my engineer turned to me again. His face was grave with that half regretful, half resigned expression one so often sees on the countenances of those who have just said goodbye to someone they hold dear.

"Yes," he said very slowly, as though the words were being forced from his lips by sheer effort of will, "this is probably the last time I shall pass this way. I shall miss it all—and yet it's the right time to get out. In ten years' time this won't be the world I've known. I should hate to see it go altogether. Heaven knows I've seen enough change in the last ten years, and in another ten . . ." He paused. "There it is—just one of those things. Progress, I suppose, is the word for it. But my job's done—I think the white man's job is done too."

"If you like the Pacific so much, why don't you settle in Australia?" I asked.

He shook his head. "Too near to it all," he answered. "I should see the changes I hate. You see, doctor, I'm a coward. I'm running away from something I can't face. I expect you're

a bit of a psychologist—like all doctors nowadays. Well, you can work it out. You'll say, I expect, that I take this gloomy view of the future because it's something I'm afraid of. Maybe you'd be right—but that doesn't make it any easier for me."

He refused to be drawn into conversation any more. For the rest of the trip—he left the flying-boat at Calcutta—I cannot remember exchanging more than a few desultory words with him. His confession had been made and he was satisfied. Obviously he was not normally a communicative man.

It was in Batavia that we had the first practical commentary on his dark forebodings. For some reason or other the pilot brought the boat in at a very low height; in fact, for some distance before we reached the anchorage we seemed to be only just skimming the tree tops. The Dutch East Indies were then in the more violent stages of the unrest that has troubled them, and not even an uneasy truce had been reached. Though I had read about it in the newspapers—and Australian newspapers naturally devote more space to Pacific news than English ones do—I had never thought for a moment that this had any bearing on the smooth goings and comings of the world's air services. My disillusionment was of a somewhat violent kind.

As we flew over a fairly densely wooded part of the country little puffs of smoke came from below. It was easy at once to recognise the marks of rifle fire.

The steward passed down the cabin.

"There's no need to be alarmed," he said soothingly. "I expect that's just a party of rebels. They've only got rifles, and they're not likely to do the slightest damage, even if they hit us."

The passengers hardly stood in need of this reassurance. They craned their necks to try to get a look at these people who wished to give us a hot reception, but all that could be seen were the little puffs of smoke and an occasional spurt of flame. The noise of the reports was drowned by the still running engines. When at last the pilot switched off for the final run in, the signs of unfriendly activity had passed. It had been so trivial and remote that I do not suppose any one of us gave it a further thought beyond pigeon-holing it in our minds as the basis of another anecdote.

ONE HORIZON

That was by no means the worst of it, however. The real demonstration, both of the strength of the insurgents and of their hostility towards white men of any kind, was to come a little later.

The flying-boat had tied up to the buoys and the entire complement was taken off in a single launch. I was getting my first glimpse of Batavia and there was not a single memory of rebels in my mind. We landed and began to make our way, stopping every now and then to look about us, to the airway's office for the usual formalities. And then the fun started.

There was a sudden crack—the unmistakable crack of a rifle near at hand—the whine of a bullet, and a little fountain of dust in the air as it struck the path ahead.

We stopped dead in our tracks. The local official of the airway stared ahead and then shouted :

“For God’s sake, lie down—quick ! Down on your tummies !”

His tone was so urgent that everyone of us obeyed at once, falling in our tracks. We were not a moment too soon. A hail of bullets fell around us, throwing the dry earth up in little columns of dust. Nor was it simply rapid rifle fire. A sub machine-gun started to chatter at us.

It looked a pretty desperate situation. These men obviously were not bandits out for what they could get. There was no suggestion of a hold-up in the affair. The plain truth was that we were being shot at—and pretty viciously at that—for no other reason than that our skins were white. We belonged to a race that had come to mean for natives of more extreme views oppression and exploitation, and we were fit objects of vengeance for years of slights and cruelties, real or imagined.

Just how far the Javanese rebels would have gone, and what would have happened to us if events had been allowed to take their course, it is impossible to say. The rate of fire showed no signs of slackening and some of the bullets were coming most unpleasantly close. Above the noise of the firing came the sound of a motor-engine, and a moment or two later a jeep bumped its way across the rough ground on the side of the path. From it descended a sergeant—a very obviously and refreshingly English soldier. At that time, it will be remembered, British forces had the unenviable task of keeping order for the Dutch in this part of the world.

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"Blimey !" he exclaimed, staring at us as we grovelled in the dust. "Saying your prayers or what ? Spot o' bother, eh ? O.K. We'll see to it."

Apparently armed with nothing more than a revolver, which he left in its holster, he strolled carelessly in the direction from which the rifle fire was coming. It ceased abruptly as he approached—though why, it is difficult to say, for he provided a perfect target. Perhaps, I thought rather shamefacedly, that was the way to treat these people—to ignore their hostilities ; if we had marched on instead of squirming like worms the fire might have stopped—though I confess I doubted it.

The sergeant disappeared into the trees. A deep silence had succeeded the deafening rattle of the rifles and the sub machine-gun, but for all that we waited for a little, deciding that safety was better than attempting to regain our feet, and, with the erect posture, a little of our sadly battered dignity. But as no more fire came we scrambled up at last each avoiding the eyes of the others. Not one of us had shown the slightest trace of coolness or courage. In native eyes we had, I have not the slightest doubt, lost face on a colossal scale. Indeed, I am inclined now to believe that it was the spectacle of a party of Europeans grovelling in the dust and showing every sign of abject terror that had led the Javanese to keep up their fire rather than an overwhelming desire for mass murder. The security of the British sergeant lent colour to that view.

Yet it was not quite as simple as that. The danger was not so completely over as we had thought. Dusting ourselves, we re-formed and, rather chapfallen, resumed our short journey—it was not more than a hundred yards to the offices. And then, when I, at least, was trying to dismiss the whole disagreeable memory from my mind, there were a couple of sharp cracks. Almost immediately the steward cried out, swayed a little, and collapsed in the dust.

At once I ran to his side. The bullets were forgotten now, though one or two more followed—luckily without doing any harm. One casualty was quite enough.

Yes, it was quite enough. Both those bullets, the rebels' Parthian shot, had found their mark, and the steward's right arm was in a rather alarming state. The upper arm was fractured,

and one of the wounds was a nasty ragged affair, for the bullet had struck one of the metal buttons on the steward's uniform coat sleeve and the jagged metal had caused extensive lacerations.

An immediate operation had to be performed. That would have been obvious even to a beginner in first aid. But where? There was no hospital at hand, as I discovered from the local official, and the military party with their jeep seemed to have disappeared.

"We shall have to carry him up to the office and operate there," I said shortly. "But that's not enough. He may need a blood transfusion and in any event he'll need the fracture properly set in plaster as soon as possible."

The official looked rather worried. "Of course, you can operate in the office if it's really necessary," he said. "But I don't know what to do after that. I've no transport, you see. My only car was captured by the rebels a couple of days ago and they set it on fire."

"You seem to be having a little excitement round about here," I commented. "There's no way of getting help? What about the Army?"

"They'd do what they could," he replied doubtfully, "but you see they have got their hands very full indeed."

"Surely there's a hospital near?" I asked desperately. "This is a sizeable place and . . ."

"Yes, I know," he said grimly. "But what you said just now happens to be right on the mark—we're having exciting times round here; a bit too exciting, if you ask me. The hospital was attacked not long ago and part of it was burnt, and now there's only a building. Staff and patients were evacuated."

"It looks pretty hopeless," I remarked; and glancing down at the wounded steward I was not so sure that that comment did not also apply to him. He was beginning to look too weak for my liking.

Quickly I examined him again. He had lost a surprising amount of blood and he was very badly shocked. But what worried me most was the fact that one of the fragments from the metal buttons had become lodged deep down in dangerous proximity to the artery. If it should move he might bleed to death. An immediate operation for its removal was necessary.

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It was an awkward predicament. No doubt I could have performed the emergency operation where he lay on the ground ; there was no special difficulty in that, nor was the course unusual in military surgery. Yet if that were done the problem of the blood transfusion and after-treatment would still remain, and every passing minute would make the need for them more desperate.

A bold course suddenly suggested itself to me, and instantly, though I knew the risk and difficulties only too well, I decided on it.

"Tell me," I said quickly, turning to the airway's official, "how soon can the flying-boat be ready to take-off?"

He gazed at me in surprise. "Within an hour in an emergency," he replied, "but . . ."

"Then make it an emergency—and a very special emergency at that," I returned. "There's only one thing to do. We must get this man back on board the boat, and I must do what I can for him while we're airborne. We'll reach Singapore sooner that way, and that's the only hope I can see."

"Yes, but doctor," he protested. "We can't shoot all these passengers back on board without letting them rest, and besides the crew . . ."

"If they don't like it, they can wait for the next one," I snapped. "A man's life is at stake. If they—and you—insist on staying here, then all of you will have a man's life on your conscience. You can weigh up which it must be : a little discomfort and inconvenience or the life-long thought of having caused a man to die."

The official shrugged and turned dumbly to the passengers who had gathered round. They glanced inquiringly at one another and then, led by the engineer who had talked to me, they slowly and reluctantly nodded their assent to my proposal.

"There you are," I said to the official. "Now make haste and see that not so much as a minute is lost."

"Very well," he said weakly. "What shall we do with Longford?" He pointed to the steward. "Take him up to the office and then shift him to the boat?"

I shook my head. "No," I said decisively. "I don't want him moved about too much ; he's too weak and shocked. He'd better be taken straight down to the boat."

He looked surprised but made no comment. Though he obviously did not like my arrangement at all, every credit is due to him for the energy he threw into seeing that it was carried out swiftly. He called to a couple of natives who had been acting as porters for some of the baggage and gave them a rapid flow of orders. They ran off at top speed towards the landing jetty. Four others were also given instructions ; they hurried cross the office and reappeared with a primitive but none-the-less efficient kind of stretcher made of some native reeds interwoven basketwise. This somewhat depleted the staff of natives, and some of the passengers looked disgruntled when the official politely told them they must carry their own baggage and return at once to the boat. I took no notice. My concern was with the wounded man.

Headed by the stretcher, the party moved off along the path, retracing its steps to the flying-boat. One or two glanced apprehensively about them, as though fearing another ambush, but there was no more excitement of that kind. As for me, I was filled with admiration for the native stretcher bearers. They set off at a pace that startled me, and I was about to warn them that they were carrying a badly wounded man and must walk quietly when I realised that, despite their quick, jerky-looking run, the stretcher was as steady as though it had been floating on a sea of cotton-wool. The path was by no means smooth ; it had sharp turns and descended steeply to the shore. Yet all the time the stretcher appeared to be quite level and the man in it seemed to experience no discomfort whatsoever. I have seen casualties carried along much shorter distances of smoothly paved street and suffer much more damage than this one did under such unfavourable circumstances. Indeed, he underwent no further damage at all.

On board the boat, with the passengers still on the jetty, I conferred with the pilot and his second on the problem of rigging up an emergency surgery. On previous occasions I have had unkind or at any rate slighting things to say about flying-boats, but now I was glad that our aircraft was of this type ; there was enough room in it to arrange a small sick-bay where I could even operate, if necessary, without interfering with the other passengers. The three of us quickly got to work

and in a little while all was ready. Hot water for sterilisation was ready on the electric cooking stove. Looking round, I decided that this was infinitely better than some of the conditions under which I had performed operations on some of the islands.

Gently, the steward was brought on board and installed in the "sick-bay." A few minutes later all the passengers were safely in their seats, and the pilot announced that he was going to take off. Nothing, I think, has ever impressed me more than the smoothness with which the flying-boat took the air. One was barely conscious of it. I know from experience that these boats are famous for the cleanness of their take-off, but this was more than clean—it was practically imperceptible. I resolved that, if I forgot all else, I must remember to congratulate the pilot on this feat of airmanship.

Anxiously I watched the patient. I did not want to operate unless that was forced on me, but my hopes of being able to leave it until we got to Singapore rapidly receded. Those fragments in the arm were still doing damage, and, apart from the appalling pain they were causing to a man so heavily shocked and weak from loss of blood, I was already beginning to fear that sepsis might set in. It would be a terrible thing if the man had to lose his arm through gangrene in any circumstances; it would be nothing short of criminal if he did so when skilled surgical aid was at hand.

On land the plan of operating in the flying-boat had seemed daring but quite practicable. Now, faced with practical certainty of having to carry out the idea, it was completely unattractive and—when I came to consider the details—almost an impossibility. Never before had I regretted so much my weakness for being what I prefer to call imaginative but some of my friends style foolhardy or impulsive. The fact remains, however, that—so far—these long shots of mine have always succeeded and the apparent impossibility has proved to be far less forbidding in realisation. Great though the problems appeared to be, I was determined that I should not fail now. My judgment was at stake.

Lost in thought and asking myself a hundred-and-one questions, most of them beginning with "How . . .?" I was sud-

denly recalled to reality by a voice at my side. I looked up sharply, wondering who it was that had come, unheralded so far as I knew, though I might have been too abstracted to hear any warning, into the small sick-bay. It was the pilot.

He smiled broadly at me. "You look in a brown study, doc.," he said. "How's he doing?"

"Not too good, I'm afraid," I replied seriously, "As a matter of fact, I was thinking things over when you came in. He ought to be operated on at once, but for the life of me I can't see fully how it's going to be done. All the same," I added quickly, determined not to be misunderstood, "it's going to be done, somehow."

"What are the snags?" he asked.

"A whole lot of 'em," I replied. "The principal one is assistance. I've been going through the passengers—not that I know them very well—and I can't see anyone of them being any good. Some of them might be willing, but that's a different thing from being any use. That engineer chap seems the most likely, yet I don't fancy the idea very much."

"What about me, doc.?" said the pilot quietly. "I've got a steady head, and my hands aren't too bad"—I thought of that superb take-off and marvelled at his gift, a very English gift—"and I'm used to gory sights. They leave me cold. Matter of fact," he added rather shyly, "I once did a surgical operation of a kind."

"Oh?" I interjected in surprise. "What was that?"

"Just one of those things that happened during the war," he answered off-handedly, as though unwilling to expand on the subject. "Had to make a forced landing in France while Jerry was still there. It was a bad show altogether, because I piled up the kite. One of the blokes got rather nastily hurt, and one finger was jammed up in the bits and nothing any of us could do could free it. So I decided with his agreement that the best thing—the only thing, in fact—was to amputate the finger. And I did."

I shuddered a little at the thought of this cold-blooded procedure.

"And what sort of instruments had you?"

"Only a clasp knife," he said. "But it was ruddy sharp, all the same. And we put him out with morphine."

Again I shuddered inwardly. Yet if the choice lay between that and falling into the hands of the Germans, perhaps it would have seemed the only course to me at the time.

"You must tell me the full yarn some other time," I said. "I think you'd make an assistant of some use. But what about the aeroplane?"

"Old Harry's got her," he said, nodding his head in the direction of what he would have called "the office." "He knows her as well as anyone; and as a matter of fact we're flying on George at the moment, so bob's your uncle."

"'Old Harry' is the second pilot, I suppose," I said, wondering for a moment whether, like George, it was perhaps some new instrument. He nodded.

So it was settled. We decided to carry on without warning the rest of the passengers. The idea of an operation being performed almost before their eyes might easily upset the nerves of some of them, and it was better to let them remain in blissful ignorance. The pilot slipped away for a moment to tell "Old Harry" what was afoot so that the flying boat could be kept as steady as possible. Running ahead of the sequence of events a little, I will say here and now that it was maintained on an almost even keel, though by what miracle of pilotage I do not know. If that is what can be done in the air, I would, speaking from my own experience, much rather operate in an aeroplane than in a ship in the middle of the Atlantic. Only dry land could have been steadier.

After a few words of instruction to the pilot I settled down to work. My chief worry was to remove any fragments that threatened danger, and I found, as one usually does on these occasions, that they were more numerous than I had suspected, though I imagined I had taken an unduly pessimistic view of the conditions. More than that, one of them was separated from the main artery by a mere hair's breadth, and it was a miracle that the blood vessel had not been pierced. The sight was alarming in itself, yet curiously it gave me a sense of relief: the operation had been vitally necessary and no one could now dismiss it as a stunt on my part. There are no more conservative creatures taken in the mass than doctors, and they are all too ready to describe anything unusual as publicity-hunting—a

label that, no matter how undeserved, is apt to prove more than embarrassing to a man in consultative practice.

One other thing impressed me: the remarkable aptitude of the pilot as an assistant. I have been struck by this before when I have had to operate with technically unskilled assistance. He did everything I asked in the most efficient way, and sometimes even, like a good theatre sister, anticipated my needs. Thinking it over, I can find only two possible explanations of this remarkable fact. One of them is flattering to the human race; it is that there are a large number of born surgeons among mankind. The other is not so flattering to the medical profession; it is that they tend, like so many specialised workers, whether mental or manual, to over-rate the technicalities of their profession, and that much of what they would have the world believe is special skill acquired only after long pupillage and experience is no more than common-sense applied with intelligence. As to which of these explanations is correct, I would not be so rash as to hazard an opinion.

The operation lasted rather longer than I had expected. Things went so well that I decided to do everything I could and not content myself with a mere emergency intervention to remove the spots of higher danger, yet leave the patient open to the probability of another operation later on. I cleared up all the fragments so far as I knew, though I realised that subsequent X-ray examination might reveal one or two that had escaped my scrutiny, and I set the fracture and repaired the damaged tissues. When I closed the last stitch in the wound I felt that between us the pilot and I had made not at all a bad job of it. Yet, even so, the danger was by no means past; indeed, it might have been increased. Inevitably, the operation had increased the shock in the patient and some more blood had been lost. I was not at all easy in my mind about his general condition, and the old jibe at surgeons kept repeating itself to me: "The operation was successful—the patient failed to respond." I did not want anything about which that might be said to happen in this particular case.

The pilot grinned as he dried his hands and resumed his jacket.

"How did I do, doc.?" he inquired cheerfully.

"Very well indeed," I replied sincerely. "I'm very grateful to you. I never expected to have such help."

He grinned a little sheepishly, obviously pleased by what I had said.

"Like to repay the compliment?" he asked with a twinkle in his eye. "I mean, 'Old Harry' wants a relief. Care to take over?"

I shook my head. "No, thanks. I don't think I'd shine so much as a pilot as you do as an assistant surgeon." I grew serious. "There's one more thing, though, and it's really in your line this time."

"Yes?" He raised his eyebrows interrogatively, but I think he knew the request I was going to make.

"The sooner he gets into hospital the better," I said. "So if you can make it snappy . . ."

He nodded. "O.K. We'll open up every tap we've got and see if we can find any more horses. Leave it to me."

He was gone, and I prepared myself for a long and weary watch. It was better I should not ask for any help; the passengers must be left alone unless sheer necessity forced me to call upon them. After a little while I went into that curious state, well known to all who have watched by a sick-bed, in which everything in the world save the patient ceases to exist. I was unaware of where I was. The drone of the engines and air-screws meant nothing to my ears. Yet the slightest movement or noise from the patient was vivid to me. Time ceased to have any meaning, and I do not know to this day how many hours—so far as I was concerned it might have been days or minutes—it was before I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was "Old Harry," the second pilot—a more restrained and formal man than his captain.

"Excuse me, doctor," he said politely. "I hope I didn't disturb you. We touch down in about a couple of minutes. We've radioed base and they report there's a special launch with stretchers and things waiting at the buoys and an ambulance is on the landing stage. They've warned the hospital, and there's a bed ready for you. Oh, yes, and the hospital say they're standing by with the theatre if you want it and they're all set for blood transfusion."

"Thank you," I said. All this was the captain's doing ; it was typical of his supreme competence. For our airline pilots in the mass I have nothing but the most profound admiration, yet, even so, I think that this one outshone the rest, a super-star among stars.

Everything went smoothly. The waiting launch was a R.A.F. one, equipped for dealing with casualties, and the crew were admirably efficient. They had the patient off the flying-boat, across the water, and into the ambulance in a time that was incredibly short. At the hospital I handed over to the surgeon on duty, after giving him the fullest information about the case.

I felt tired and a little depressed. "I came out to the Pacific on a holiday," I said ruefully, "and I seem to have done nothing but emergency operations all the way. I hope this is the last of 'em."

The surgeon smiled cheerfully. "Well, you never know your luck," he remarked. "There's plenty of trouble out here, and the kind of trouble that means casualties ; and when there are casualties there's a need for surgeons ; and . . ."

"Oh, shut up !" I said impolitely but grinning. "Next time I'll take you with me so that I can stand by and laugh."

He chuckled, then grew serious. "I can't see that happening," he observed. "No leave for us till kingdom come, so far as I can figure it out. You'll see what I mean when you've had a look round."

It was only then that I fully realised where I was. I had been rushed from 'plane to launch, from launch to ambulance, from ambulance to ward, and I had taken it all for granted. I was in Singapore—Singapore, the great naval base on which a misguided Government had lavished millions—and had withheld the few thousands that would have provided the aeroplanes to protect it when the Japs came. Yes, it was Singapore—Singapore that glittered like a rich jewel in the Empire's crown but had crumbled to mouldy dust when the assay was made.

I did not care about that then. What I wanted was a bed—and I did not mind whether it was in Singapore or Sydney or Shore-ditch. And even that had been provided.

The surgeon put out his hand to steady me as I yawned cavernously and swayed a little on my feet.

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“You’re all in, old man. Come on to bed. We’ve enough patients to deal with without having you on our hands.”

He led me gently away.

CHAPTER XIII

Restless Orient

The hospital surgeon had been right. I was dog tired. It had been a very long time since I slept as I did then. A troubled wardmaid had awakened me and told me, in agitation, that I must get up and dress as the flying-boat would not wait for me. For a moment or two I had thought I was being called out for emergency work in the blitz . . . just as it had happened not once but a score of times. Then I realised the sense of her words.

"Oh, to hell with the flying-boat!" I said, my voice still thick with sleep. "It can go anywhere in the world—I don't care."

I rolled over and went to sleep again.

It was, in fact, not until the next day that I felt my normal self again. No doubt it was the reaction from all the exciting and trying experiences I had been through, though reviewed in cold blood they did not seem particularly alarming or even disturbing. The flying-boat had gone long ago; it was probably another thousand or so miles nearer home by now. Reflecting on this I grew annoyed at having missed it. I had been in a frenzy to get back to England. In Australia I had by sheer persistence and by making a nuisance of myself—as I believe—managed at last to get a valuable berth. Now, for no really valid reason, I had thrown my chance away. The horrible thought that I might spend weeks or even months in Singapore appalled me. Forthwith I made my way to the airline offices.

The officials there were helpful and polite—as airway officials invariably are, no matter what their nationality. There is probably not, even in these days of shortages, any body of men more skilled in the art of saying "no" and of sending disgruntled would-be customers away not with a sense of grievance but with the impression of having been granted a favour.

As soon as I mentioned my name the official nodded, as though he knew all about the case.

"Well, of course," he said, "we can guarantee nothing. You do understand that. Our bookings are made up for a long time to come. There may or may not be a berth on the next boat, but at the moment I can't say definitely."

"Then am I to be marooned for an indefinite period here?" I demanded fiercely.

"Oh, no, sir," he replied soothingly. "Not at all. But you do understand the position, don't you? You had your reservation to England and it is—bluntly—no real fault of ours that you've missed it."

"I see," I commented bitterly. "But . . ."

He made an extremely polite but very firm gesture to stop my outburst.

"At the same time, sir," he went on suavely, "we do recognise that there are special circumstances. We do hold ourselves under a debt of obligation to you. You saved the life of one of our stewards and therefore we're prepared to regard you as a very special priority and take special steps to see that you're not unreasonably delayed."

"Thank you," I said, a little breathlessly. I had not expected anything like this. But I did not wish to assume an attitude of humble gratitude. "What precisely does that mean?"

"Simply this, sir," he answered. "There's another boat homeward bound due in to-morrow. One of the passengers is, as it happens, one of our own people—actually he's going home on leave. Now we propose to try to induce him to let you have his berth and we'll fit him in somewhere later on."

"That's very good of you, indeed," I said; and this time I was really impressed.

"Of course," he insisted, "we have no absolute power to requisition his berth, and he has the right to refuse, but I don't think that'll happen. At the same time, I don't want to raise false hopes by making it appear all cut and dried to you."

"Yes, I can see that," I said. "Shall I come up here tomorrow morning, then?"

"If you will be so good," he said, with the formal courtesy of his kind. And then he suddenly smiled. "You see, doctor," he said slyly, "we shall be very glad to see you safe and sound in England."

"Indeed?" I returned in surprise. "How do you make that out?"

"Well, you see, you're rather an embarrassment to the airways system in the Pacific," he explained. "We've had a confidential report about you from H.O. You've delayed one boat and you've speeded up another—so it seems that if we have you on our hands too long you'll disorganise the whole schedule."

I could not take offence at this dig, which was well deserved; and he made it, too, in a manner which was completely without malice.

"Then we're in agreement," I commented, smiling. "The sooner I get home the better. I like adventure but I'm beginning to think that the Pacific area has just a little bit too much for me. I need a rest for a little while—but you can tell your people that I'll be back some day and then I shall start all over again."

"We'll face up to that when the time comes," he said, chuckling. "And I think you can assume that you'll get your berth."

I thanked him again and left to see the sights of Singapore.

Singapore has become something of an unhappy legend of the war. It was the scene of a disaster that had none of the saving glory and desperate heroism of Dunkirk. Britain has the habit of taking greater pride in some of her defeats than in her victories, but Singapore is not one of them. The name of Singapore is graven on the heart of the British people in the same sense as Calais was on the heart of Queen Mary. The whole affair has already been the subject of heated controversy and I shall not add to it.

My interest in the settlement was of a different kind—though it sprang, like so much else, from the results of war. The surgeon in the hospital had said to me that the medical services were overburdened and that I would easily see why for myself when I had the chance to look about. And almost as soon as I got out into the streets I could see what he had meant.

Singapore, as I saw it, was one of the most heart-rending sights in the world. I have seen plague and disease-ridden communities—I think, for example, of the scourges of yaws in the islands. But it was not plague or disease in the usual sense that had descended on Singapore. It was something far more insidious, far more deadly in the long run, and far more distressing.

Never before have I seen such widespread and overt signs of universal malnutrition. I hope I shall never see the like again. It was everywhere. A doctor looking for subjects to photograph for plates in a book on malnutrition would have had no difficulty in finding all he needed. In a short walk one saw almost all known deficiency diseases ; and this was particularly so among the children.

This is one of the most dreadful sights in the world—a population stricken with malnutrition. A doctor thrown in the midst of a disease-ridden community feels the urge to do something about it ; he can take steps, however ineffective they may seem, to deal with the situation, and it is his task and privilege to do so. But against malnutrition he is to all intents and purposes helpless, though he may feel the urge to take action ever so strongly. It is only with the end products of this plague that the doctor has to deal—and more often than not that is, in itself, a hopeless task. Against disease he has his drugs, his injections, his sera—the whole battery of modern therapy. He cannot fight malnutrition in the same way. For malnutrition is not primarily a medical question ; it is an affair of economics and trade, of supply and transport, of crops and food. The doctor can advise, saying that what is needed is this and that ; but he cannot provide. That is for governments and similar organisations. In truth it is a matter of “ governments ” and not “ a government.” For the supply of food, its provision in full measure and in a form that is properly balanced, is a world problem and one that the peoples of the world must face as a whole if it is to be solved.

In normal times the peoples of Asia have been particularly cursed with malnutrition and all its subsequent evils—rickets, sleeping sickness, and so on. The tide of war has increased the difficulties, wiping out crops, disorganising transport, taking away means of livelihood so that, even when there is food, many cannot afford to buy it. I can think of no better thing than that those who think that the distribution of food is just another commercial transaction, an affair of making hard bargains, of profits and supply and demand, should be forced to spend six months among the peoples of Asia. If they have hearts, those must be melted.

Yes, Singapore was a depressing sight. It saddened me and completely wiped out any desire I might have had to make a tour

of the guide-book features of Singapore. Slowly I made my way back to the hospital where I was making my temporary abode.

As luck would have it, the first person I met was the surgeon who had taken over the case of the wounded steward.

"Hullo!" he said. "Still here?"

I nodded and explained the position.

"You're lucky," he remarked. "Some blokes here have been waiting for months for a chance to fly home. Been taking a look round?"

Again I nodded—this time slowly and seriously. "Yes," I replied. "I can see what you were getting at the other night when you said that you'd got your hands full. It's a horrible sight."

"It is," he said decidedly. "It's worse than that. It's something you can't get used to. They come here and implore us to save them. But what can we do? What's the good of sending them away with good advice, saying they've got to eat more? It's nobody's real fault, I suppose—it's everybody's fault, and things like this will go on happening so long as nations insist on going to war and using all their efforts for destruction instead of for construction. Tell me, Borodin," he went on intensely—I had obviously touched on a subject that meant a lot to him—"tell me, why is it that when white men colonise and try their best to do a good job for the people, they're howled at for being exploiters and oppressors and all the rest, but if they shoot and burn and bomb they're hailed as heroes?"

"Don't ask me," I replied. "Until that question is answered and the solution is found for the problem, this world is going to go on from bad to worse. In fact, you might say that the primitive peoples are best left to their own devices, for the closer they get to civilisation, the closer they are to death and annihilation."

"That's true," he observed. "I've worked out here for nearly twenty years now. I went through the Jap occupation and I know all about it. And I've come to the conclusion that if you totted it all up you'd come to the answer that for every evil thing the white man has stamped out in the Far East he's planted at least two more. It's not a very cheerful thought, and it's probably an exaggeration, but that's the way it gets after you've been out here for a few years."

"I think I can understand," I observed quietly. I was thinking of the engineer I had talked to—he who had also expressed a sense of frustration, tragedy, and loss. It looked almost as though this frame of mind had become epidemic among the white men in the East.

For the rest of that day I stayed in the room which the hospital had put at my disposal. I had no desire at all to go out, and I spent quite a little while in vain regrets that I had not gone on with the flying-boat. Here were no adventures into the colourful, the romantic, or the amusing. I wanted to escape the accusing, tormenting sights of the streets.

My fate was in one of her blacker moods ; she had determined that I was not to escape so easily. During the evening my surgeon friend came to me again.

"Care to have a look round ? " he asked.

"Yes, of course," I replied. I was always ready to take a look round a hospital, especially in a strange land, and it was, moreover, an act of courtesy incumbent on me. But I suspected there was something deeper behind this invitation. My impression was soon to be confirmed.

As we paced down a long corridor towards the wards, Dr. Durleigh faced me with a slight smile.

"Of course," he remarked, "I've a deep-laid purpose in all this. I want you to see some of the sort of things we have to handle. It may break your heart. I hope it does. You see, I like everyone of any sort of position in England to take a look round and preferably to be badly shocked by it all. They may do something about it. The more people there are rooting for a sane scheme of world food distribution the better. Besides, you're a doctor and you're also a writer—I've read some of your books—and so, you see, you're a specially useful person to cultivate."

"Thanks," I returned, with a hint of irony. "It's nice to know exactly why I'm appreciated."

He chuckled a little awkwardly and led me into one of the wards.

I had thought the streets had been a depressing enough sight, what I saw here was more terrible still. Here were the wrecks of the storm, the people in the final stages from which there was

little or no chance of escape. There were wasted and withered human forms, barely recognisable as human beings still alive ; there were children with their frames warped and with an expression of untold age on their faces. Here were the unremembered casualties of the war—the victims of neglect and shortage. These were not heroes, nor were they criminals by any standard.

“ And if we pull some of them round—what ? ” demanded Durleigh as he shut the door behind him. “ Cripples, perhaps mentally deficient—that’s all. Are those human beings ? Life has nothing left for those people and never will have now.”

I did not know what to say. He was stirred to indignation—an indignation that, I think, burned always in him with a torturing heat. But for me the sight was heart-rending, laying a weight of depression on me that I was powerless to lift, however slightly.

“ Tomorrow,” he said quietly, “ you’re going back to England. Yes, I know food’s short there, and it’s not what it was in the old days. But it’s nothing like this, is it ?

I shook my head.

“ No. Dull and uninteresting, maybe, but at any rate you’re not bringing up a nation of crippled and dwarfed children. Will you remember that when you feel inclined to grouse at your rations—remember this ward and the streets outside ? ” His eyes glowed passionately. “ And will you tell them the story of all this ? ”

“ Yes,” I promised. “ I’ll do my best.”

And this is in part fulfilment of that promise, a sombre interlude in my story, yet one that cannot be omitted. Yet, as I think back on those travesties of human beings, as I do often and not without a shudder, I cannot help asking myself what is the good of telling England only ? It is the world that must be told, the world that must be aroused. For the first time in history an international court has sat in judgment on men arraigned for “ crimes against humanity.” That was a great step forward ; Nuremberg may be a name ever to be remembered in the emancipation of Man. But if it is important and right that such a trial should have taken place, it is at least as important that other and less obvious crimes against humanity should not be perpetuated—anywhere in the world. One can torment a human body with a whip or a branding-iron ; no less can one destroy it by taking away those simple

things which all life, whether human or sub-human, demands as a natural right.

So, when I called at the airways office and was told that all arrangements had been made for me to continue my journey, I heard the news with profound relief. Singapore is one of the places that do not recall happy memories for me. It is, too, a place I shall never forget. Perhaps I shall visit it again—and then, I hope, I shall find that conditions have improved and that the shadows have lifted.

The party with which I found myself on this second flying-boat was a very different one from that with which I had travelled to Singapore. It was composed almost entirely of Ensa artistes returning from a tour of British military stations in the Far East. Though they looked tired and were obviously keen to return home once more, they proved lively companions, and I was very glad to find myself in such cheerful company after the rather harrowing time I had in Singapore.

They talked, as stage people always do, “shop”—but it was a little different from the usual actor’s shop. One caught glimpses of performances given in queer places before even queerer audiences. There have been many criticisms of Ensa, but most of them have come from the stay-at-homes, judging entertainment by comfortable standards of regular performances and proper theatres. I do not think that the men who fought in the hell of the Far Eastern campaigns or who have kept their isolated and lonely vigil in remote places since Japan collapsed would have anything but praise for the wonderful work of these artistes. None have carried out more fully the stage tradition that “the show goes on.” Nothing daunted them. And if sometimes their act did not come up to the standards of the West End stage or of Hollywood, is that really remarkable? The marvel is they did so well. And to those who saw the shows, these people were ambassadors and envoys of goodwill from Home, that place which has ever been the ultimate paradise of the exile.

I sat back and listened as they exchanged stories, and it was an entertainment in itself. They had seen plenty of trouble but there was no prophet of doom among them, none who could have been called a spiritual brother of my engineer neighbour on the previous boat. All thoughts of unpleasant events passed

from my mind—except perhaps that these happy people might bring me better luck. Surely nothing untoward could occur to such a company?

But that restless spirit which is now parading in the Orient takes no account of individuals. It cares not what they are or who they are, except that it marks whether their skins be white or coloured. And if they are white, then it is ready to stir up mischief. Perhaps it even takes a fiendish delight in bringing trouble to those who have least deserved it.

Not one of us, I am certain, had any thought of trouble when we landed at Rangoon. We came in perfectly and were received with the usual courtesy. If there had been any suspicion of trouble afoot, I am sure we should have been warned not to go out. But no such warning was made, and we decided to make an evening of it and see the sights of a place that all of us felt had some new experience to offer us. Rangoon had—but it was not the sort of new experience we either expected or wanted.

It happened as we were returning to the airways' hotel. Perhaps we were a little noisy, for we had had a merry evening, and the Ensa party in any event were a lively crowd who did not believe in the merits of silent contemplation. But we were not rowdy in any way. We were laughing a lot—yes, and that may have caused the trouble; for some obscure reason Asiatics do not like laughter—at any rate the white man's kind.

Suddenly we became aware of a small knot of people following us. There was nothing remarkable in that in itself; people have a right to go more or less where they will, even in Rangoon. But this group was obviously dogging us, and now one or two of its members were forcing themselves on our notice. One of them darted forward and stood in our path.

"White men—and white women!" he snarled; and he spat expressively. "Go home where you belong."

He stared straight at one of the Ensa actors as he spoke, and this man, Arthur Cowdray, took this as an invitation to reply.

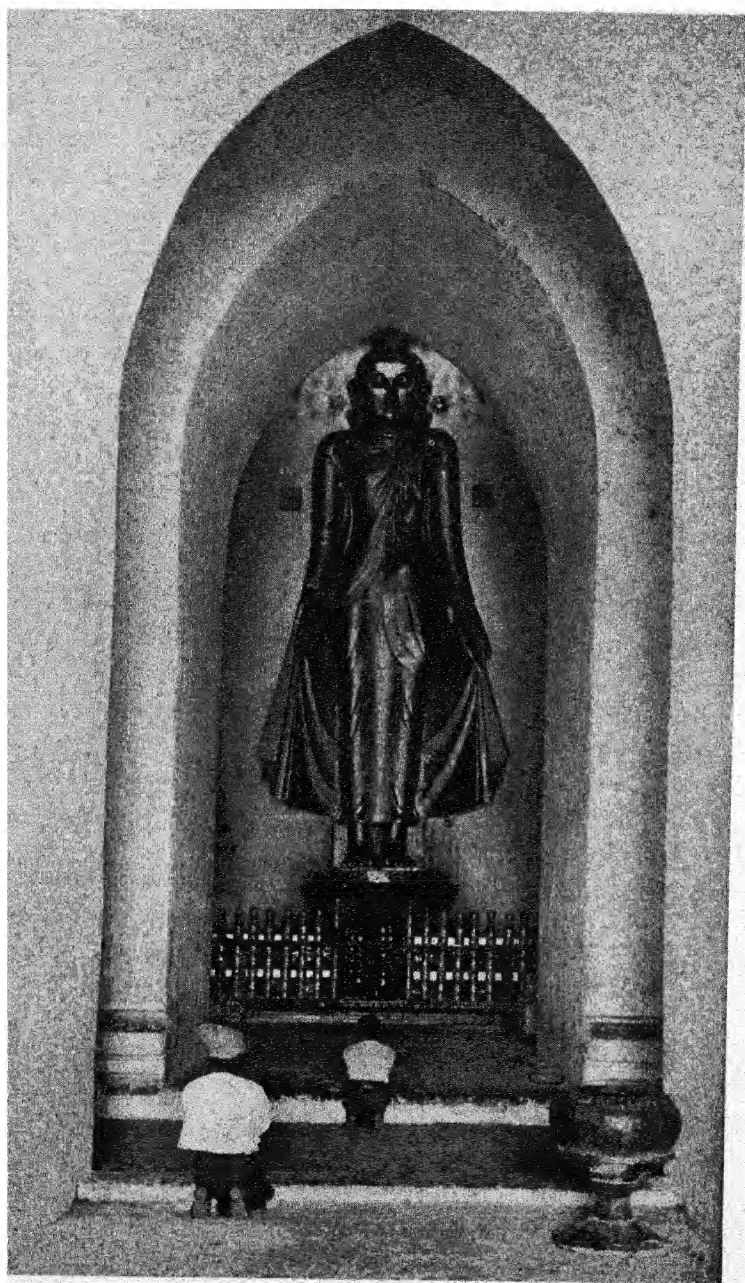
"Certainly, old boy," he said amiably. "Nothing suits us better. The sooner the flying-boat takes us off the better—and so say all of us."

"Get out!" said the Burmese.

"O.K.," replied Cowdray, still remaining calm. "But you



BURMA. Great Pagoda at Prome.



BURMA. Ananda Temple, Pagan.

see, old boy, you happen to be standing right in the line of fire—I mean, we want to go that way, back to the hotel, and you and your friends are blocking the path.”

The man made no comment, but as we made to move forward the crowd shifted aside a little, as though to let us pass. We decided, by an exchange of glances, to move ahead quietly, but it was clearly understood, though no word was spoken, that we would give no offence at all to these people, who were clearly on the look-out for trouble.

They allowed us to pass through, but they did not leave us alone. As we marched forward, now strangely quiet in contrast to our earlier merriment, they pressed in on us, making it difficult to keep to the path, jostling us, and obstructing us in every possible way. With difficulty we controlled our tempers, especially when one or two started shouting insults—one of the voices, by the way, had a remarkably good English accent.

The tactics of the crowd were fairly clear. They wished to promote what diplomats call an “incident” and make it an excuse both for immediate action and for subsequent denigration of white men’s behaviour. This was so patent that we were all the more resolved not to fall into so simple a trap. It was becoming more and more difficult, however, for the jostling was growing harder and harder, and no one, especially after an entertaining evening, likes an evening stroll turned into a good imitation of a loose maul on the rugby football field.

At last Cowdray, who was leading the procession, stopped.

“I say,” he appealed, “we’d get along much faster if you chaps wouldn’t shove us about so. We’re no more anxious for your company than you are for ours.”

It was no good. The crowd may have taken exception to his last words, for progress now became slower than ever. One of the girls complained that she was sure she was bruised all over, and I was inclined to agree with her, so far as my own body felt. I began to despair of ever reaching the hotel.

We ploughed our way on. The attempts of the Burmese to enrage us grew more and more marked. It was not simple jostling now; we were practically being mobbed. One of them put out his leg, and a young actor named Barry Western stumbled. He let out a violent oath and half clenched his fist but, white

about the face with rage, he managed to control himself, to his everlasting credit. But the incident was enough. The mob piled around us, shouting and yelling, some brandishing sticks, and all looking extremely aggressive. Our hour had come, I decided. I had been through all sorts of adventures, and now all was to end at the hands of a mere rabble annoyed with us simply because our skins were of a different colour to theirs. It was not a very happy thought.

The men formed into a little knot round the women, though there were so few of us, all told, that we had little chance of survival if these people got really angry.

"We do not want you," said their spokesman. "This is our country, and you have been here long enough."

"Far too long for my liking," said Cowdray. "Have a heart, old boy. Let us get to the hotel and we won't stay here a minute more than we can help."

The spokesman smiled unpleasantly. "It is amusing to hear a white man asking us coloured trash for permission to do something. You are the rulers of this country—so you say. Why do you not call for the police?"

Cowdray stared at the man in blank astonishment.

"Why the hell should we bring the police in on this show?" he asked in amazement. "All we want to do is to get down into our beds."

"While we sleep on our mats in the open," said the Burmese.

"Now look here, old chap," reasoned Cowdray, "we're not out for trouble of any sort. If you've only got a mat to sleep on, that's just too bad, but it's not our fault. You just let us get back to the hotel, there's a good chap."

Apparently these exchanges were not to the liking of the crowd, who had begun to murmur ominously. Suddenly they rushed at us, swinging fists and sticks, and shouting at the top of their voices. Luckily there were many of them and few of us; I think they damaged more of their fellows than of ours. We ducked and dodged, and so far as I know not one of our party hit out, though it was a sore trial to our self-control. We all knew that a single blow from us would probably let loose real violence besides which this, unpleasant though it now seemed, would have been as nothing.

How it would have ended I do not know. Tempers were fraying badly among us, and a little more of it would have seen a set-up fight develop. But just in the nick of time there was a sudden rush and half a dozen men forced their way through the mob. These were the police. It was the first time I had seen the lathi used ; and I know now why it is so feared and why it has become looked upon by many natives as the symbol of all that is most to be feared in the white man's rule.

It did not take the police long to disperse that little crowd. I do not think anyone was arrested, nor do I think the police would have had much chance of catching anyone if they had felt so inclined. The Burmese broke and fled. In the presence of the police there was none of the arrogance and aggressiveness they had shown towards us, unprotected.

A tall, good-looking Burmese, in uniform, came towards us.

"I hope they have done no harm," he said in excellent English. "There are unfortunately too many of these people about, making capital out of the disturbed conditions. They're not part of any political movement but just rowdies looking for trouble. Are there any casualties ?" he asked.

All of us shook our heads and, after further apologies, the officer led his men away.

"And that," said Cowdray, when we were in the lounge of the hotel, "is that. I think we all deserve another drink, don't you ?"

It was a proposal with which we all agreed.

We had not escaped so lightly as I had imagined. I had thought there were only minor bruises, but, as we waited for the drinks to be brought, one of the girls suddenly went white, swayed, and almost fell to the floor. Barry Western caught her and carried her to a couch.

I stooped over her. She had an ugly cut on her right shoulder, caused, I imagine, by the sharp edge of a stick, for it was ragged and there was a good deal of associated bruising. Her chief trouble, not surprisingly, was shock. I attended to her and had her sent to bed and then I returned to the lounge.

"Now," I said grimly, "we're going to have a roll call. It's no good thinking we're a lot of heroes. I'm going to examine every one of you to make sure that everyone's all right."

There was no difficulty about this, but I found nothing else at all serious. Plenty of cuts, scratches and bruises, and a little shock, for it had been rather more than a trying experience. Eventually I declared the field dressing-station, as Cowdray termed it, closed, and we made our way to our beds.

Next morning we were surprised by a police escort waiting for us to take us to the flying-boat base. It was only a precaution, the officer in charge explained, but there had been a sudden outburst of rowdyism and there were orders that no risks were to be taken. If we pooh-poohed the idea openly we were, I think, secretly glad, for the memories of the previous evening were fresh and unpleasant. At any rate, I know the sight of the police was reassuring and I would not willingly have dispensed with them.

A little later we were airborne. None of us waved a regretful goodbye to Rangoon. We carried with it not memories of opulent sights and sounds but associations of a most unpleasant kind. It had provided for me, at least, the first real evidence of the new spirit in the East. The affair in Java had been impersonal and remote, despite its tragic consequences ; this business had had an altogether more personal flavour.

Cowdray sighed and settled himself more comfortably in his seat.

"Charming people," he remarked. "Somehow I don't think I shall be paying a return visit to Rangoon for quite a while—in fact, I couldn't care less if I never saw the place again."

The grave expressions on the faces of everyone spoke of unanimous agreement.

That leg of the homeward trip has, in my memory, something of the quality of a dark nightmare. It was only when we were far out over the ocean, alone with the sea and the sky, that I had any impression of security and peace. Land meant trouble. The greater part of the population of the world lives and works in Asia, and there are more differences between many of the Asiatic peoples than there are between Briton and Frenchman or Greek ; yet all of them seemed spurred on by a common desire to assert themselves and drive back the white man to the places whence he came.

We were coming in to Calcutta now, and a little while before

the boat landed the pilot himself came into the cabin to speak to us.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said gravely, "I'm sorry to say that I have rather bad news for you. We've been warned by radio that Calcutta is in a very dangerous state. There's an outbreak of rioting on the widest scale and it is definitely dangerous for any white person to go about the place. You will be taken under escort to the hotel, and I must ask you to remain indoors until you are fetched and brought back to the boat. This isn't just a recommendation by our people—it's virtually an order from the Government, who say they cannot accept responsibility for what may happen to anyone who ignores the warning. There you have it. I'm sorry it's like this, but it can't be helped."

On top of our recent adventures, this news came as a renewed shock to us. I think all of us had been looking forward to a little relaxation in Calcutta, which, as one of the principal towns of India, was one of the sights I particularly wanted to see. But it was now clear that on this homeward run I would be well advised to put all thoughts of pleasure and sight-seeing from my mind. The day when Asia had been a playground and a showpiece was definitely past.

Of Calcutta itself I can say nothing. I had no adventures there. On the launch that took us ashore there were a couple of British soldiers. On the jetty we were handed over to an armed escort, which business-like action had completely dismissed any lingering idea I might have had that these measures were an excess of caution. We were again told to remain in the hotel and reminded that the city was under a curfew order; and as though to drive home this point, even as the officer in charge of the escort was talking to us, there was a sound of distant rifle fire and the noise of a clamorous mob. This was not an atmosphere in which to grow romantic and talk of the glamour of the East; it was grim reality—the reality of bitter conflict, not only between white man and brown, but also between Hindu and Moslem, a conflict between colour and colour and creed and creed.

Needless to say, we were not sorry when we were collected and taken out to the boat. I had been sorely tempted to go out to see for myself what was happening, but the sight of armed police and of troops moving about in anything but a careless or formal way deterred me. And it was as well that prudence prevailed. That

day the communal riots had reached their peak. The police had had to fire into the mob, and there had been a distressing number of casualties. Troops had been called out and tear gas had been used. Arson and looting had taken place on a fairly extensive scale. Looking back on the city from the flying-boat, we could see small columns of smoke curling lazily upwards, the remains of the fires. My thoughts turned to other days in which such sights of tragic damage had become almost daily commonplaces to Londoners emerging from their shelters and basements into the light of day.

When we made Karachi we found a much more normal atmosphere. I would not say that all was peace, for there is not a part of India—or, indeed, of the Far East—in which today some sort of tension does not exist. One gets everywhere the impression that the fires are smouldering below and that the slightest incident will be sufficient to cause them to break out in all their fury. But at any rate we could move about the town as we pleased and indulge our fancies for seeing the sights as we wished.

It was my first visit to a busy Indian town, and I suppose my impressions were similar to those of almost everyone in such circumstances. I brought away with me a rather confused idea of seething crowds moving in every direction and without any obvious purpose; of the latest forms of transport mingled in narrow streets with oxen-drawn wagons such as had been in use for centuries. I recall, too, that permeating, inescapable smell that emanates from every Eastern bazaar, a smell that is unique and unforgettable. Karachi is a modern Indian town, owing almost everything to the enterprise of the white population, yet it is also essentially Indian; and though people tell me that to see Karachi is not to see India, I do not think its counterpart could exist outside that vast and teeming country.

From a brief and hurried visit to any town one is apt to bring away some striking memory that is probably not at all characteristic of the place. It is the thing that has taken one's fancy and will be forever associated with that town in one's mind. And of Karachi I have one very curious and vivid impression. There is plenty to buy in the town; the bazaar and the shops are busy and prosperous-looking places. Yet the notion I gained was that the cheapest and most plentiful commodity was women. No matter

where I went—and my experience was repeated with every one of the other men of the party—I was offered girls, many of them still in their early teens, and the price asked was never more than a few shillings. Even in the primitive societies of the Pacific islands I had never before had brought home so strikingly to me the Asiatic attitude that women were mere goods to be bought and sold. My impression was—though this may be merely one of those distorted ideas that come from quick visits—that the provision of women for amusement was Karachi's chief contribution to the Indian tourist trade. Certainly the business seemed to be operated on a very extensive scale.

To all intents and purposes Karachi is the gateway of the Far East. Here the Middle East begins and ends. It is the borderline between different civilisations and cultures. And when the flying-boat took off from Karachi I felt that, at long last, and after nearly a year, I was saying goodbye to the true Orient. India holds no happy memories for me, and it may be long before conditions make it possible for me to fulfil one more of the promises I have long made to myself: to spend months in that splendid land and steep myself in its glorious relics and in the curiosities of its present-day life. For I have seen glimpses not of the true India but of a land undergoing the agonies and maladjustments of political fever. In India, Fate decided to frown heavily upon me, as though to restore the balance for all the happy moments she had bestowed upon me in the Pacific. For it does seem to me that only the operation of malign destiny can explain the chapter of misfortunes that is the story of my progress through Java, the Straits Settlements, Burma, and India.

It was not only that the people showed their worst side to us. The elements, too, fought against us. Between Calcutta and Karachi we were forced down on Lake Gualor. The monsoon had broken sooner than usual and the flying-boat had been making heavy going. One of the Ensa girls developed a bad attack of air-sickness, and indeed conditions were so bumpy that I experienced a few qualms myself. In the end we force-landed on the lake, not only to enable us to avoid the discomforts and even dangers of the weather but also because of the boat's long fight against the adverse wind had seriously reduced her petrol supply, and the pilot had not enough in hand to bring us safely to our destination.

It meant a few more hours added to a journey that, for me, looked as though it might never end.

Yet, in all this gloom, there was one bright spot, and it is on this ray of lightness I shall close this chapter. My mind goes back to Penang. Here was a little island settlement that seemed to have withstood all the maladies that were afflicting its neighbours. In Singapore, in Burma, there were ample signs of the passage of war—shattered buildings, malnutrition, the unlovely relics of engines of destruction. But the war had passed by Penang without trade. It smiled colourfully in the sun as it had done for centuries, a small paradise all the more attractive today because it is an oasis in a desert of wreckage and unrest.

And it was here that we were introduced to the finest of all tropical drinks—the milk of the unripe coconut. Thirst had laid its hand upon us after a strenuous, well-packed tour of sight-seeing. We longed for something cool and refreshing. A native offered us a nut, and we realised that here indeed was nectar.

When we clamoured for more, one or two of the boys climbed the trees to collect fresh supplies. We watched, fascinated and amused, and then, caught up in the spirit of the place, we were spurred to emulation. But climbing a coconut tree is not so easy as it looks when it is demonstrated by natives who have practised the art since their childhood. Most of us fell, luckily without damage, and lithe young Barry Western was the only one who, by luck or skill—I suspect it was the former—secured a prize. But all of us had the rich reward of laughter.

Perhaps it sounds trivial, barely worth recording. Yet that incident stands out as something bright and gay in a period that was heavily oppressed by darkness and trouble. Sometimes, when I recall the trials, I wish that I had never passed that way; and then the memory of Penang—with its beauty, its sunshine, its laughing people, and its coconuts—comes to me, making it all appear worth while. No, I would not have missed Penang for anything. There, at least, I had a vision of the true Orient, the place of colour and charm which has fascinated travellers for centuries and which, when men grow sane again, will bewitch with its magic for generations to come.

CHAPTER XIV

Europe Again

Asia was slipping away. The flying-boat stemmed her way north-westward. It is true that the land over which we were flying is marked on the maps as "Asia," but maps are made by geographers who look on the world not as a place of peoples and cultures but of land masses and their relations. Some, I believe, regard the differentiation of Europe and Asia as one of those historical blunders that were better not perpetuated, and would have the whole area re-christened Eurasia. This is a narrow and, to my mind, misguided way to regard the world, for it is the people and their lives which matter most: and in these later days, when the culture and learning of the West are spreading to every corner of the earth—as I had so lately seen with my own eyes—classification into land masses can only become of more and more specialised interest. Nor can it be urged that the geographer's way of looking at things is the more eternal; for land shapes change and whole continents—if the geologists are to be believed—have disappeared beneath the waters, their places to be taken by newly-born ones.

When one moves westwards from India one sets out on a journey that takes one to new peoples—new, that is to say, in the sense of different, for the races of the Middle East are amongst the oldest in the world. And that name which I have used—Middle East—is, in its traditional use, surely the best one to describe this area. During the late war it came to be applied to countries that could have no claim to it at all—nor even, so far as I could see, to the title of Near East; for surely North Africa cannot claim to belong to the Orient?

Yet, if the peoples of the Middle East are different in so many ways from those of India and the Far East; if they speak other tongues and have built up their own characteristic civilisations, they share today one feature in common with those nations whom

the geographers would call fellow-Asians. On them, too, the demon of unrest has laid his hand and breathed upon them the fire of insurgence. For there also is unrest and all the uneasiness that accompanies the birth of new ideas and the remembrances of past greatness.

In these lands of the Middle and Near East, our own civilisation was born. Here, too, originated most of the legends of the opulence and glamour of the East. But today one is not conscious of these things. One sees towns that are modern in every detail—and up-to-date in a sense that few towns in England are ; though not far away are the crude villages and the haunts of nomad tribes whose way of life has been left untouched by the renascence of the countries. Over all is the shadow of Oil—the oil that has caused men to create fruitfulness in the barren desert, and to haggle, barter and intrigue, on a scale that even that prince of intriguers, the Khalif Harun-al-Yashid, would never have imagined.

It was in Basra that this state of affairs was vividly brought home to us. I had always thought, as people who live in England are apt to do, of Iraq as a place where the British were looked upon as friends and colleagues. True, there had been rebellions and uprisings, but I had always imagined these as minor affairs—the sort of business likely to arise in any country where the tradition is to settle differences of opinion by cold steel rather than hot debate. Had Britain not carefully built up Iraq into a modern state and, when the time was ripe, bestowed upon her independence? Were there not almost annual messages of goodwill? Did not treaties exist that bound the one country to the other as allies?

These might be facts—but it is no less a fact that we found in Iraq a state of turmoil amounting almost to insurrection on a big scale—and it was not so much an affair of internal political differences as of a holy war against the white man. “Get out of our country” seems to be as much the modern creed of the Middle East as of India and Indonesia.

We landed at Basra and were warned that there were some disorders, though we received no stringent instructions to remain in our hotel. And it was because, as a party, we decided to go out and see the sights that, once more, we ran into trouble.

No, I have no stories of hold-ups in the streets, of pitched battles fought against odds, or of desperate adventures among would-be assassins and kidnappers. It was our absence rather than our presence that was the cause of it all.

It had been a pleasant enough evening, and we had marvelled once again at the curious amalgam of old and new, of western and eastern civilisation, that is the keynote of towns such as this. The people had been friendly enough, though there had been hints of trouble, and we learnt that only the week before there had been quite serious rioting in the streets. The news was passed to us as a matter of interest and not in any way as an oblique warning to us to behave ourselves.

The first indication of something afoot came to us from a taxi-driver. We piled into his cab—I do not know if there are laws against overloading in Basra, but if there are we must have broken every one—and called to him to drive to our hotel. To our astonishment he refused flatly. Indeed, he became almost aggressive, and ordered us to remove ourselves from the cab immediately. He spoke English fairly well, though with the curious sing-song intonation that all the Arab peoples acquire.

"But why?" I asked, acting as spokesman for the party. "It's not far, and the roads are good."

If we had asked him to take us out into the surrounding country, his attitude could have been better understood.

He shook his head. "No tell why," he replied firmly. "I not going that way. That's all."

"There's trouble?" I persisted.

He drew his finger expressively across his neck and then, bounding into the cab, which we had perforce vacated, he drove away like Jehu, who may conceivably have been a remote ancestor of his.

Blankly we looked at each other.

"Well, that's that," said one of the men. "But it doesn't really matter. We can easily walk it."

Walk it we did; and we made quite good going of it, for we were anxious to see what was happening. There was a mystery here and I, for one, think mysteries are something to be probed. Our curiosity was not left long unsatisfied.

From a little distance away, the hotel presented a sight of

utter confusion. Shouts rent the air. Groups of men were running hither and thither. Lights flashed. The whole scene was lit up by the huge headlights of several cars.

This looked serious. Exchanging rapid glances, we pressed forward at a trot and quickly arrived on the scene. The whole hotel staff appeared to be gathered in the foyer, talking and gesticulating wildly. Police and soldiers were interrogating them. At the main door we were held up by an armed guard, who, when he found we were British, summoned an officer to deal with us.

"You are the party from the flying-boat," said the officer in perfect English. "We have been looking for you for I'm afraid we have bad news for you."

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "What's happened?"

"The hotel was attacked a short while ago by an armed mob," he replied. "They held up the manager and staff, and then they proceeded to ransack the place. You'll find, I regret to say, that they've taken everything you left here."

For a moment none of us could speak. We just stared at the officer as though what he had said was beyond our powers of comprehension. He remained quite unperturbed.

"Perhaps you will go to your rooms and check up," he went on. "My men will accompany you. When you've done that, I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to return here to the hall and wait until I give permission for you to return to your rooms. Our investigations are not yet completed upstairs. I am sorry to put you to this inconvenience, but it is vitally necessary—for your safety, it may be," he added impressively.

"Our safety?" I repeated. "How . . .?"

He checked me. "These gangs are not mere thieves," he explained. "Often they are terrorists as well, and they have a little habit of leaving bombs behind them. We wish to make sure that everything is as it should be before we allow guests to use their rooms."

"I see," I said lugubriously. This was surely the most unfortunate trip I had ever made.

That thought was reinforced a hundredfold when I was escorted to my room by a dapper little sergeant of police, who also spoke English well—only less fluently than his superior.

In fact English is widely spoken in Iraq, no doubt as the result of the long British operation of the League of Nations mandate.

I have rarely seen such complete disorder as there was in the room, which I had left neat and tidy. Drawers stood open. The bed had been stripped and the mattress slit, no doubt to see if any valuables had been concealed in it. To make matters worse, a policeman was busy tearing up a floorboard in search of the hypothetical bombs. Whatever happened, I thought, I was not likely to spend a very comfortable night in that room.

At the request of the sergeant I looked round. Everything had disappeared. I had not even a toothbrush.

"Perhaps you can give me a list of your property, please," said the sergeant politely.

I did, taxing my memory to make sure that nothing had been omitted, and when it was finished I was taken back to the hall, where I found some of the others of the party already waiting, with dejected expressions.

"It's a ruddy bad show," remarked Western. "What they want with the various odds and ends I'd got, the Lord alone knows."

"It's difficult to understand," I replied. "It's a good thing we aren't allowed to carry much by air. I don't care so much about the clothes and things—I suppose those can be replaced somehow—but what worries me is the loss of my instruments."

"You won't need coupons for those," commented Western, obviously bitter about his own losses.

"That's true," I said, "but some of them will be almost impossible to replace unless things in England have improved a lot since I left. You see, there were some of my special instruments for plastic surgery in that case, made to my own special requirements, and it may be months before I can get anything like them."

"Bad luck," said Western, though I did not feel that he was at all impressed or really felt any sympathy. "Some old dowager'll have to wait to have her face lifted now. Too bad."

I shrugged and moved away. It was useless to argue with that point of view. It is one of the hardest things plastic surgery has to face—the belief that its sphere of usefulness is confined

to a sort of glorified beauty treatment. When plastic surgeons have done so much to restore the terrible disfigurements inflicted on men by war, it is strange indeed that the attitude still persists.

Reflecting sadly on my loss, which was truly serious, I moved away from the group, wishing to be alone with my thoughts. I had brought those special instruments with me not because I expected to practise during my tour but so that I might have practical exhibits for the lectures I had arranged to give in Australia. I wished now that I had never done so. It was a doubly hard blow that I had brought them so far only to lose them on this the final stage of my journey.

There was less confusion now. The police had apparently completed most of their inquiries, and the guards were being relaxed, though not entirely withdrawn. Still wrapt in my thoughts I wandered out into the grounds. The night air felt cool and refreshing and it was a welcome relief to get away from the shouting and confusion of the hotel foyer. No one challenged my passage out of the building. A policeman passed me, gave me a quick glance, nodded, and passed on. Apparently I was free to move about as I wished within reason.

That thought was soon to be rudely dismissed. I was passing a clump of bushes when a couple of men stepped out. I could see they were armed, and for the moment I imagined they were part of the police or military guard. When my arms were seized, and a voice hissed in my ear telling me to be silent, that illusion vanished. A revolver muzzle pressed into my back suggested that resistance and cries for help would be useless.

I was dragged into the bushes. The man who had first spoken to me whispered again.

"You must come with us," he said. "I will explain later. Keep low. Don't stand up or you'll be seen, and then you, as well as we, will probably get shot. In any case if the police fire at us, we shall use you as a hostage. Be a sensible chap. Now—get going."

My arms were tightly held by a man on either side of me. In a crouching position I was hauled through the bushes until a narrow track was reached. Here a car was waiting, and I was hurled into it unceremoniously. I know now how a sentient

sack of coals might feel when it is emptied into a cellar. The door slammed behind us and the car shot off.

"You will excuse me," said my gaoler, "but this is rather necessary."

He wound a heavy scarf round my eyes.

I do not know how that car escaped detection and pursuit but, so far as my ears could tell me, it made its journey entirely unmolested. The trip occupied some little time, but that may have been because it was thought wiser to take a circuitous route as much to deceive me as to minimise the risk of police intervention. We travelled fast—it was easy to feel that; and the roads over which we went were not too well surfaced. That was as much as I could learn by using every one of my senses, except that of sight which was denied me.

At last I was pulled to my feet and forced out of the car, through a narrow passage—I could feel the walls scraping my sleeves on either side, and my guards walked ahead and behind instead of by my side—and then finally through a door. I was led, still blindfolded, up some stairs, which creaked unpleasantly. A door closed behind me and I heard a key turn. Then, at last, the scarf was taken from my eyes.

"This is the doctor," said the man who had brought me; I assumed he was in charge of the party.

I was in a small, square room, lit uneasily by an oil lamp. At a table sat a grim-looking man, whose age I guessed at some forty years. He had an air of distinction about him, and he was wearing clothes that were a colourable imitation of the uniform of an officer of the Iraqi police. He eyed me keenly.

"Good evening, doctor," he said; and his accent was that of a cultured Englishman, though he was obviously an Arab. "I'm sorry that our introduction has been so unceremonious, and I must apologise for the inconvenience you have suffered. At the same time, necessity knows no law, and I ask you to believe that I am honoured to make the acquaintance of such a distinguished surgeon."

It was difficult to decide whether the last words were spoken sincerely or in irony.

"It's been more than inconvenient," I snapped. "It's been uncomfortable. What do you want?"

"I renew my apologies," he returned. "We will get down to business. But first I will introduce myself—a little. It's sufficient to say that I am in command of this section of a certain organisation, that has—well, shall we say fundamental differences of opinion with the present government of Iraq and particularly with the European and American commercial interests which threaten to make our country a slave to Western finance. The police, bless their little, simple hearts, describe me as a dangerous terrorist, but in reality I am a disinterested idealist.

For myself, I prefer the western way of life and would gladly settle in England or France in normal times. As perhaps you've gathered, I was educated at one of your English public schools and I went up to Cambridge and read for the Bar. However, all that is neither here nor there."

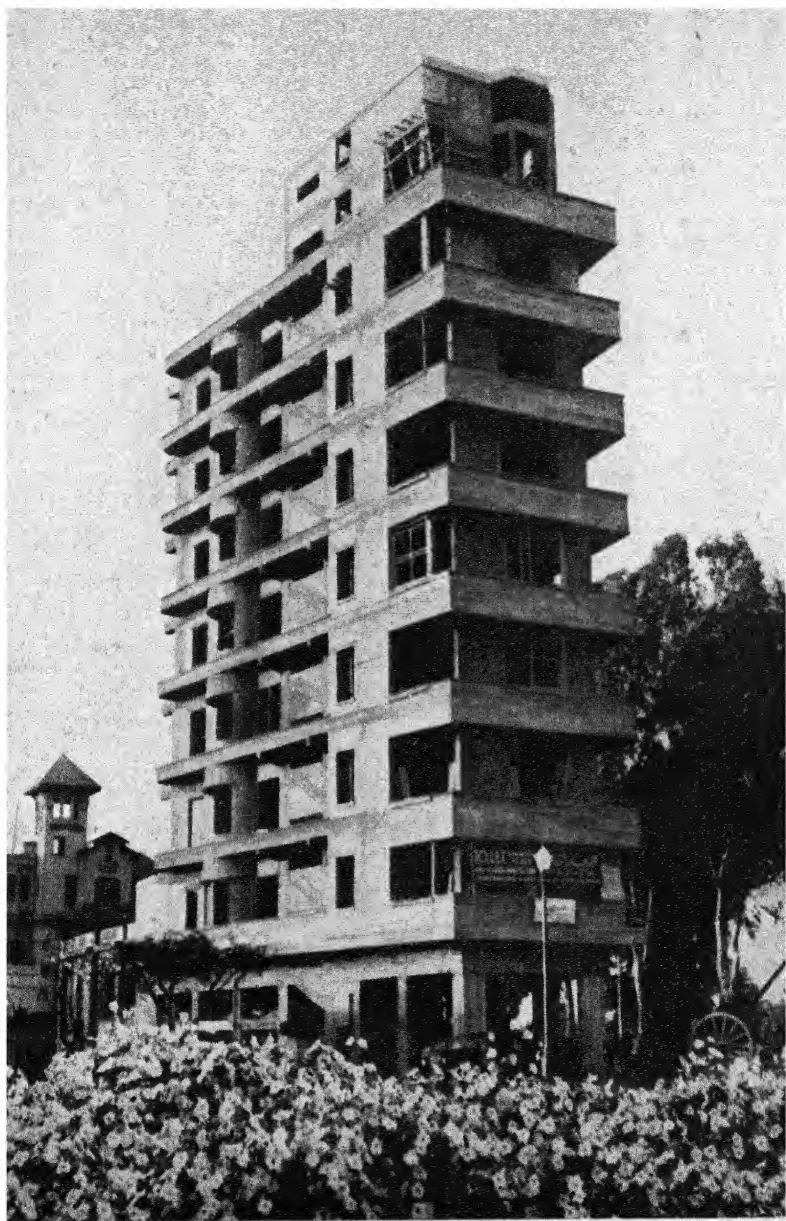
I looked at him and wondered. Perhaps he was what he described himself to be—an idealist; he had the right expression about the eyes. Yet if so, why purloin the travelling bags of innocent travellers?

"I see," I commented. "Is it idealism to take away my toothbrush and my razor and steal the ladies' beauty creams?"

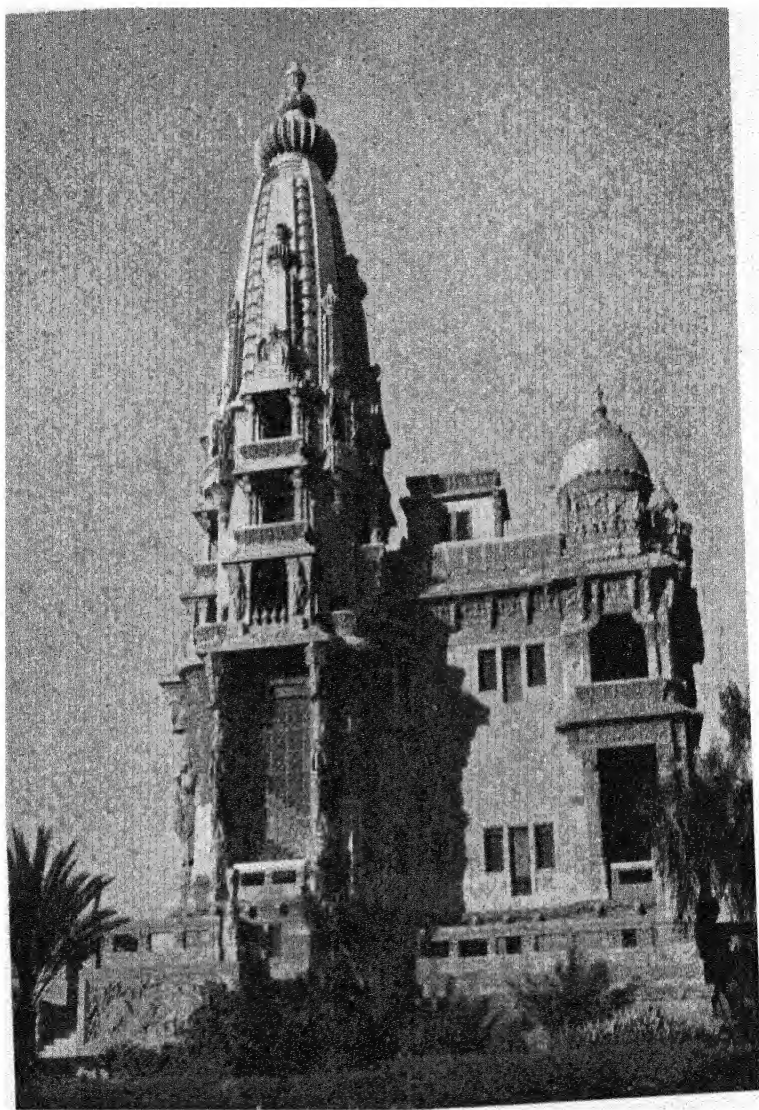
He chuckled. "I can see you have a sense of humour," he remarked. "Unfortunately, it is sometimes necessary to play down to the people and satisfy their uneducated passions. I believe there is something much to the same effect in your Bible. However, this is getting away from our business. It is urgent, doctor—and apart from that I'm sure you do not wish to remain here longer than is necessary—though I for one should be delighted to have an opportunity of getting on better terms with you."

"What's urgent?" I demanded, determined not to be sidetracked by this persiflage.

"This is an emergency call, doctor," he replied. "The sort of thing that, in different circumstances, you are accustomed to, I've no doubt. Unfortunately, in the little affair at the hotel, one of my men was rather badly wounded. He happens to be one of my most trusted lieutenants—which was why he was left behind to report on the subsequent police operations. He failed to make his getaway in good time, and one of the soldiers



CAIRO. Modern Apartment House.



CAIRO. Private Villa.

let off a Sten at him. I'm afraid he stopped rather more of the bullets than is good for his health. He is, in fact, in a pretty desperate condition.'

"I see. And you expect me to take on the case?" I rejoined. "I should have thought you had other means."

"For normal cases, yes," he answered. "But this case demands an immediate operation. That is the opinion of our own doctor—he studied in London, by the way—as well as my own lay opinion. And as we have a surgeon of your standing in our midst, and this man's life happens to be of special value to us, it is quite natural that we should turn to you for help."

"And if I refuse?" I demanded.

His eyes closed a little, and his mouth straightened.

"Must we talk about unpleasant things, doctor?" he said. "You can't refuse to save a man's life, whoever he may be. For you, I think it would be a fairly simple case, and when it is over you will be taken back to the hotel. More than that, your case of instruments, which, I gather, is of great value to you, will be returned in due course. On the other hand . . ." He gestured as though dismissing something superfluous. "But, really, doctor, I'm sure there's no need to discuss alternatives."

It was as awkward a situation as I could have imagined, one that might have come straight out of a thriller; and I did not like it. As a doctor I could not let a man die, and this enigmatic Iraqi was right in saying that who and what he was did not concern me as a surgeon. On the other hand, as a law-abiding citizen it might get me into grave difficulties with the authorities if it became known that I had assisted the terrorists in this way. I was there under duress, however, and that seemed the answer to the problem. Under duress, I must do whatever I could. Not even the police could blame me for that.

Some, in the comfort of their fireside chairs, may say that was a weak decision and that I never faced the issue squarely, preferring to buy off my conscience. These things look different when one is able to approach them as exercises in ethics from what they do when one is faced by armed men who are determined they shall have their way.

"Very well," I said quietly. "I will do as you want me to do,

but it is under protest. When I am released—and I trust your promise—I claim the right to complete freedom of action.”

“Precisely, doctor,” said the leader, with a smile. “That is exactly what any man in your position will do without loss of honour. As to your freedom of action, we do not propose to do anything to limit that further—which is why, as perhaps you guess, we thought it necessary to blindfold you on your journey here.”

I nodded and indicated that I was ready. The Iraqi rose, crossed to the door, which was opened for him by one of his guards, with a clicking of heels, and then bowed to me with a sign that I should precede him.

I was conducted up a flight of stairs to a small room, where a man lay on a bed. A lithe, tall Arab, in European dress, rose as we entered and shot me a quick, searching glance.

“This is our resident doctor” said the leader. “You must excuse me if I prefer not to mention names. I will leave you two together.”

The young doctor bowed to me. He murmured something in English about being honoured to meet me, but I took no notice. My attention was riveted on the man in the bed. It was clear that he was in a very low state and in urgent need for attention.

“What do you make of him?” I asked the Iraqi doctor.

In quick sentences he told me. There were three bullets in him, so far as he could discover, and a lot of blood had been lost. The doctor had not done anything beyond immediate treatment as he had been told I was coming.

“What facilities have you got?” I asked, my eyes still on that white, passive face.

“A little place . . .” he replied, rising. “See for yourself, sir.”

He opened a door and led me into his “little place,” which turned out to be quite a well-equipped small surgery. There was an operating table. Overhead was a simple but efficient-looking lighting unit. What took my attention, however, to the momentary exclusion of all else, was my own bag of instruments, conspicuously placed on a side table. I wondered whether that had been the bait all along.

I returned to the patient and made a thorough examination. An immediate operation was necessary in order to remove the bullets, one of which was lodged in a very dangerous position. But what he would need after that was a blood transfusion. I asked the young doctor about it.

"Yes, it can be arranged," he said. "I would have seen about it before if they had not told me you were on your way. It will have to be fresh blood, but I have made the tests, and I can get some Group O at once."

I nodded again. He seemed quite competent.

"Why didn't you operate yourself?" I asked.

He shook his head and smiled a little sadly. "I don't altogether trust myself," he replied. "You see, sir, I'm not fully qualified—I missed my last year because—well, because of trouble," he ended vaguely.

Once more I nodded; I thought it best to say as little as possible and specially to abstain from any comment.

I have carried out many operations in less favourable circumstances. The young man proved an admirable assistant, and I felt that his reluctance to operate had been due more to lack of self-confidence than to any real deficiency of knowledge. To anyone with experience of war surgery the operation itself was little more than a routine. What concerned me most was the after-treatment. Except under irresistible pressure—which in this case would mean forcible detention against my will—I did not intend to miss the departure of the flying-boat.

The bullets were extracted and the wounds cleaned up and closed. The actual surgical intervention was over. I looked at my watch. At best, I should not now get more than an hour or two's sleep, for the boat left quite early in the morning. I turned to the "resident doctor."

"Do you feel capable of taking charge of the transfusion?" I asked.

He nodded quietly. "Yes," he said. "Watching you—being in the thick of it again and not feeling that I'm out of it all and on the shelf—has given me back my confidence. You get terribly mistrustful of your own powers when you're on your own all the time, you know. Often I can't even get hold of the medical journals, and as for the latest books. . ." He shrugged hope-

lessly. "You've done me a world of good, sir, as well as the patient. Thank you. I can look after the rest of it."

"I'm sure you can," I said. And then my sympathy for a young man who obviously had—or had had—glowing professional ambitions overcame the discretion I had hitherto imposed on myself. "Yes, it must be pretty awful being always on your own like this. Why don't you chuck it, qualify properly, and come out in the open? There's a shortage of good doctors everywhere, you know, and I'm sure Iraq isn't any exception. On the contrary, I imagine that every possible doctor's needed out here, and there ought to be plenty of scope in a young country like this."

He shrugged and glanced at the door as though dreading eavesdroppers.

"Needs must when the devil drives," he said hopelessly. And then, in a sudden burst of confidence, he told me his true name and that of the great London hospital at which he had studied. "Look me up in the records when you get back," he added grimly. "You'll see what I mean by the devil."

It would not be fair to give his name here, but when I returned to London I was still interested enough to follow up his suggestion and find out what I could about him. It was a tragic enough story. He had been one of a group of medical students whom the Iraqi Government had sent to London, a specially selected half dozen of whom much was expected. The judgment of the selectors was certainly justified so far as this young Iraqi was concerned. He covered the earlier parts of his course with sheer brilliance, taking everything in his stride and having difficulty in keeping his pace of progress down to the rather leisurely rate imposed by the curriculum. Few students had shown greater promise of a rich and successful career, and the reports on him must have brought pleasure to the government of his country, which was paying all his expenses.

Then came the tragedy. He became involved with a girl—an English girl. She was going to have a baby by him. He offered to marry her at once, for he was very much in love with her and had always intended marriage when the proper time came. But now difficulties arose. The shadow of the colour ban des-

cended on the distracted couple, the girl's parents threatening all manner of unpleasant consequences if she should marry the Iraqi student, while, on his side, he was informed that he would forfeit his grant and support if he married anyone before his studies were completed—particularly an English girl.

It was a desperate, harrowing situation, and no doubt it temporarily upset his sense of judgment. In a brave effort to provide a way of escape for the girl, he attempted an illegal operation—with almost fatal results. Only after months in hospital did the girl recover and by that time the young Iraqi was back in his own country, disgraced and dishonoured everywhere. He was, of course, completely debarred from completing his medical course, for he had committed one of the most deadly of all violations of the medical code, even before he was qualified. His own government disowned him and with the ruthlessness of the eastern mind imposed penalties on his family in an effort to recoup the national funds with money the government felt had been scandalously wasted. Perhaps it is no wonder that the young man felt himself an outcast and an outlaw, and, no doubt soured with bitterness and vain regrets, he threw in his lot with the revolutionaries.

But then, of course, I did not know all this. I knew only that I had been for a little while with a young man who had in him the stuff of which great doctors are made. I do not know what strangled ambitions my words had reawakened in his mind. He looked at me with an expression of deep anguish, his mouth twitching slightly, his arms hanging limply in front of him. Then, without a further word, he opened the door and, with a nod to me to follow him, led the way back to his chief's room.

The leader looked up as we entered.

"Is it all right now, doctor?" he asked, looking at me inquiringly.

"So far as I am concerned," I replied, guardedly.

"He'll recover then," said the leader, as though my words had conveyed a completely satisfactory prognosis to him.

"That I can't guarantee," I said. "A great deal depends upon our young friend here." I nodded to the resident doctor. "But you need have no fears. The patient will be in very com-

petent hands. I've given a few words of advice, but even without those the case will be well handled—I'm sure of that."

The leader nodded. "Thank you, doctor," he said. He hesitated. "Am I permitted to offer you some tangible evidence of our gratitude?" His hand moved slowly towards his pocket.

"No," I snapped indignantly. "I didn't want this case, and I ought not to have touched it, anyway. Certainly I ought not to have had any sort of connection with you and your criminals, and I definitely don't intend to accept any sort of fee from you. If I've saved a life, well and good, though it's a poor thought that probably I've only saved it for the gallows in the long run. I should like to go at once." I added peremptorily.

"You shall, doctor—you shall," the leader answered with a slight smile at my outburst. "I could argue with you over your statements, but I appreciate that you're in a hurry and would like some rest before you rejoin your aeroplane. I will see that you are conducted back to the hotel. You must forgive us if we have to repeat certain precautions, very necessary in all the circumstances."

"You mean blindfolding?" I asked.

He nodded. "Yes. Regrettable, but unavoidable." He stood up. "I should like to express my deep gratitude, doctor, not only for all you've done, but also for behaving in the way you have under circumstances that must have been most distasteful to you. I would like to shake your hand but I feel the gesture would be inappropriate."

He hesitated, but I did not accept the implied hint.

"And now, doctor, goodbye, and thank you again." He signed to one of his lieutenants as he spoke, and the man, who I recognised now as the one who had conducted me to this house, wherever it might be, stepped forward, a bandage in his hand. He held it out to blindfold me, but before he could do so I turned again to the leader.

"You're forgetting part of your promise," I said. "I'll take my instruments with me."

He smiled deprecatingly. "Do you think it would be wise, doctor?" he asked.

"Wise?" I felt my temper rising. Wrongly or rightly, I

had trusted that promise of his, but now, it appeared, he was going to break it.

"Yes, doctor—would it be wise?" he repeated. "No doubt you will be able to explain your absence from the hotel quite satisfactorily as it is. Men are men everywhere, you know, and this town caters very well, I am told, for men's peculiar needs, especially those of travellers." He gestured meaningly. "But if you return carrying your case of instruments and no other property is returned . . ." He shrugged. "Is that not likely to give rise to embarrassing questions—even to suspicions that you might have had dealings with the accursed thieves? You didn't conceal your loss very well at the time, you know." He smiled. "No, doctor," he went on, "it is better done another way. I have not forgotten my promise, nor have I any intention or wish to break it. To return those instruments is the least I can do in thanks for your help. They shall be returned to you in perfect condition—however, it will not be here but in London. Soon after you arrive they will be delivered, as an undistinguished parcel at your rooms in Harley Street."

He laughed softly at the look of surprise on my face.

In this, as in everything else, I was in his hands. However courteous and superficially deferential he might be, he had but to dictate terms and I had perforce to accept them. I nodded and then indicated that I was ready to be blindfolded. The night's business had made me tired, and my only recognisable desire at that moment was to obtain a little sleep.

Just as I had left the hotel, so I was returned to it. The car made a seemingly interminable journey, but the more I think of it the more I am convinced that the gang's hide-out could not have been very far from it. No one was about when I strolled through the grounds. A policeman, padding softly backwards and forwards by the hotel porch, stiffened suspiciously as I approached, but when he saw me he smiled knowingly.

"Oh, it's you, doctor," he said. "Had a pleasant evening, sir?"

It was easy to see what he thought. That crafty gang leader knew the pattern of his fellow countrymen's minds.

I nodded and yawned. "I'm tired," I said. "Yes, it was quite an interesting time," I added.

"There's always plenty of amusement in Basra for travellers," he said, "Good-night, sir."

I climbed the stairs to my room without meeting a soul. It would be easy enough, obviously, to handle the question of my absence so far as the local inhabitants were concerned. For a man in my position to spend the night among the alleged "entertainments" of the town was the most natural thing in the world. What I feared was the reaction of my fellow-voyagers. Even if they accepted the native view of my presumed goings-on, they might take offence; in any event I should most certainly drop in their estimation—not that it mattered particularly, though I still had a little time to spend with them in fairly confined quarters.

Luckily, my absence had not been noticed. Probably they had all been too occupied with their own affairs, and there had been too much confusion for them to spare any thoughts for me and my possible activities. If it had been noted that I was not present, then it would be assumed I had gone to my room to lament in privacy the loss of my precious instruments.

Basra was, then, another place of which I was glad to see the last. My adventure there would, doubtless, provide me with another good story to tell if I had the courage to do so—as I find I have; but it was hardly a pleasant adventure. To make my memories of Basra even less pleasing was the persistent doubt about the return of my instruments; I felt more and more strongly that I had been fooled, and that the case I had carried so carefully across the world was destined to become the property of the young Iraqi whom his employer described as his "resident doctor."

As Karachi is the gateway of the Far East, so Cairo is the portal of the Near East. We were on the fringe of Europe again, for North Africa in general, and Egypt in particular, were part of the ancient Roman world and more akin to Europe than to the East. It was the nascent Mohammedans sweeping in their tide of conquest round the Mediterranean who made Egypt the typically Arab State it is today. Typical it is. Like the other places we had touched, Cairo, too, was in the throes of trouble.

We arrived there in the midst of one of the perennial students' strikes and riots, and we were warned strongly to remain within

the confines of the hotel. The stories that reached us with monotonous regularity emphasized the wisdom of this caution. Trams were being stoned, cars and taxicabs overturned. Riotous mobs were marching up and down the streets, demanding this, that and the other. British troops were confined to barracks, though even there they were not entirely safe from the hostile attentions of an inflamed crowd. It must seem odd to many people at home, especially those with a traditional cast of thought, that the mainspring of this demonstration was dissatisfaction with what was termed the "pro-British attitude of the Egyptian Government." And so Egypt, with its rich wealth of interest for the peaceful traveller, is yet another place to which I have been, but of which I can say little from first-hand experience. It is another one to add to the list of those which I must revisit under more favourable circumstances.

I had left Karachi with the thought that, the Far East behind us, the hoodoo of trouble that had so far dogged us would depart. It had not. On the contrary, we had, it appeared, run into more personal trouble in the Middle East than before. The thought, in a different setting, was renewed as the boat took off for the long leg across the Mediterranean.

We had crossed the frontier between two civilisations—two civilisations, those of west and east respectively, which, on mixing, were proving an explosive combination. Europe, I knew, was racked with trouble. The scars of war, more deeply graven on the souls of people even than on the towns and cities and land, were still red and raw. But, underneath it all, Europe had an age-old stability of ordered government that history had shown always reasserted itself in due time. Here, at least, we would not be mobbed and fired at simply because our skins were of a particular shade. It might be that in some countries the colour of our political beliefs might determine the attitude of others to us, but those were not things that could be discovered at a glance.

As the boat swept along over Italy my thoughts turned backwards through time to the days of my youth, when Italy had been my home and when I had studied there. . . No doubt Italy was a different land today. She was recovering, painfully, from two disasters : long years of misrule under Fascism, and

the effects of war and invasion. Yet, from the air, the country still seemed the same. The sun shone on it from an arch of clear sky. I was Home again.

We flew on, land and sea slipping away beneath us, and each minute bringing England two miles or more nearer to us. Our troubles were over. . . .

Yes, they were over so far as untoward adventures with the people were concerned, but Fate was determined to have a last throw at us. Below was the Bay of Biscay, that great inlet of the sea which has become synonymous with all that is worst in sea voyaging. And that day the gods of the weather were set on showing us that though man may take wings and escape from the perils of the sea, he is still at the mercy of the winds.

The clouds gathered and the wind mounted. The rain pelted down. With each ticking second visibility grew worse. Below, great seas towered and broke in angry swirls of white foam. Still the flying-boat fought on, but it was obvious all was not well. Speed had dropped considerably for the wind was coming from the north-north-west.

I looked down at the sea and wondered what would happen to us if we should be forced to land among those tumultuous waves. It would not, I imagined, be for very long.

Darkness began to fall, and still the tempest raged. The second pilot came into the cabin and spoke to us. We should have made England that evening, he explained, but it was impossible in the existing conditions. We were making for the Channel Islands, where we would land for the night. In a little while we would be out of the worst of it, and there was no danger . . . The worst that would happen was a slight delay . . .

Delay! This meant one more day added to those I had already lost, on a journey I had promised myself I would make with all speed. Partly, of course, it had been my own fault, partly fate had forced it on me. I longed for nothing more now than to be again amid the familiar sights and sounds of my own work, in a world of reality, prosaic, perhaps, but stable. At last—but for how long?—my thirst for adventure and my wanderlust were satisfied. Therein, I think, lies the chief virtue of these excursions into the exotic and the bizarre; one acquires a new and hungry taste for the normal things of life, and one

comes to that state of grace in which one can count and appreciate to the full one's blessings.

Yes, there would be delay ; but, at least, it would be delay among a friendly people. It would be delay among part of the British Isles.

And when, exhausted and a little dizzy, we landed at St. Helier, where the seas were comparatively calm again, we received a welcome that was warm, kindly and utterly unassumed. No longer was there that feeling that we were aliens of a hated origin—a feeling one acquires in some parts of the Far East, even though technically they may be part of the British Empire. We were back among our own people who, though not English and though not overawed by force, threw in their lot with Great Britain because of a common loyalty to a single Crown.

Because there was this unspoken bond between us, the sights of privation that met my eyes had a double sadness. Few places in Europe suffered more from the denying hand of Naziism than the Channel Islands, where starvation was general and death struck with a generous hand. Yet the islands remain cheerful, confident, even happy. The sun rose for them again, as it will rise again for all the peoples of the world.

Next day we took off for the last stage of all. A light mist drifted down the English Channel, and the skies were grey. Yet, unmistakably we were home.

It was almost a year since I had left London, and she had saved a typical reception for me. A mist wrapped the familiar sights, yet it was the same, unchanging city. The mist condensed into a searching, fantastically cold drizzle, yet it did not depress me. The thoughts of perpetual sunshine, of vivid colours, of an air that held no breath of dampness—these surely were half recalled memories of some dream.

I turned into a restaurant that had been an old favourite of mine. They had not forgotten me, and I was almost royally received. And it was there that I found a year amid the plenty of another world had almost imposed new habits on me.

Would I take wine ?

Almost mechanically I had nearly answered yes. It cost so little in Australia, and it was so good. I asked the price. Three pounds !

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Yes, I was back in England all right.

What would I have for a sweet?

I asked for fruit. My mind was fixed on pineapples and oranges and peaches, on fruits still warm from the sun that this country had yet to discover. Yes, certainly there was fruit; they had been lucky that day at the market—there were a few apples.

I was back in England. It was 1947.

CHAPTER XV

The Backward Glance

For some weeks after my return I was exceptionally busy. Old patients were eager to welcome me back—nothing in comparison can give a doctor a greater thrill of pleasure—and new ones were waiting to see me. I had been away rather longer than I had intended, which made it a little more difficult to pick up the threads again. So it was not at once that I was able to sit back and sort out my impressions of a trip which had taken me round the world and brought many strange and illuminating experiences. Sometimes I think that this retrospect is the most pleasant thing about a voyage of adventure of discovery; in the backward glance one sees things in a new and proper perspective, and one can assess the true value of events that, at the time, one was inclined to over-estimate or under-estimate according to the stimulus of the moment and the immediate environment.

It was, as a matter of fact, a strange and unexpected incident that sent my thoughts roaming once more among the Pacific Islands and my spirit retracing the course of ten thousand miles that I had travelled.

Late one evening, when my secretary and receptionist had both gone, I was still in my rooms making some notes about an interesting case I had had that day, when the front-door bell rang. For the moment I took no notice. The bell rang again, this time for a longer period and with a note of insistence—for it is strange how much individuality the tinkle of an electric bell can have. Now I recalled that, except for the housekeeper in the basement, who was a little deaf and had a habit of ignoring all but the most despairing assaults on the front door, I was alone. Should I answer or not? Was it for me or for one of the other doctors in the house? It requires very great self-control and determination to ignore a ringing bell, whether

it be of telephone or of street door. If one does so, one is haunted afterwards by accusing thoughts: Was it important? Have I missed someone whom I would have liked to see or speak to? On the whole I think that the boredom of being trapped into a conversation with someone one does not like is more endurable than the agonies of mind that follow a refusal to answer a bell.

So I went, trying to resist the temptation to hurry, for the bell now was ringing loud and long.

On the doorstep stood a lean, shabby man with suspicious eyes, as though he distrusted everyone with whom he came in contact.

"Name o' Borodin?" he inquired with an air that suggested my answer, whatever it might be, would be accepted with the greatest reserve.

I nodded. "Yes. That's me," I said, in defiance of the purists.

"Oh!" he said darkly, as though he was not quite satisfied. "You're a doctor, ain't you?"

Again I nodded. "I am," I pointed to the brass plate. "There's my name," I added.

"Yes. Well." he went on uncompromisingly, "I suppose you know who you are, but my orders is very strict. 'Give this 'ere parcel to Dr. Borodin 'imself,' he says, 'and make sure the gent you're talking to is the doctor,' 'e says.' "

"Who says?" I demanded.

He shook his head mysteriously. "That's asking questions," he observed, "and I ain't giving no answers. Not that I could if I wanted to, but that's neither 'ere nor there."

He stood silently staring at me as though trying to see through my suit and discover if I had the right laundry marks on my shirt. As this seemed likely to go on indefinitely, I decided to bring matters to a head.

"You say you've got a parcel for me?" I suggested tentatively.

"That's right," he returned, making no effort to produce it.

"May I have it?" I asked.

He hesitated. "Well, that's what I'm 'ere for, ain't it?" he remarked, with a hint of aggression. From the inside of his seedy overcoat he brought out a package of a size that I should have thought was impossible to conceal in his garments, but somehow or other the trick had been done.

"Do you want a receipt?" I asked as I took the parcel from him.

He seemed doubtful. "Nothing weren't said about it," he said, "so I don't s'pose it matters."

I fumbled in my pocket and gave him a half-crown. He took it with a furtive air as if it was blood money on which a curse had been placed.

"O.K., guv'nor," he said by way of thanks. "S'long."

He disappeared into the evening shadows.

With the parcel in my hand and my mind full of questions, I returned thoughtfully to my room. I was expecting no parcel—certainly not one delivered in this rather unusual fashion. I wondered how he would have behaved if he had come earlier and encountered the receptionist—a stern and determined young woman who was inclined to give an over-literal interpretation to the instruction "By appointment only." I fancy the meeting would have provided a battle royal of wits that would have been well worth following. But that was neither here nor there. I had received a mysterious parcel, and the only way to discover more about it was to open it.

The parcel was stoutly packed, but bore no distinguishing marks at all—not even my name and address. I am not one of those people who (as I think) waste time, labour and temper in wrestling with complicated knots and fastenings on parcels. A parcel presumably contains something that the sender wishes you to have, and if he employs a special messenger it is likely that he wants you to receive it as soon as possible. Therefore, it is no more than common courtesy to open it with the utmost dispatch—all of which may be a mere rationalisation of my uneconomical habit of using a knife and ripping off wrappings. I lost no time at all over this particular parcel, for the more I thought about it the more mystifying I found the whole circumstances.

The know-alls and the wiseacres will, of course, say that I ought to have known at once what it contained, but they will come to this incident fresh from reading the earlier pages. I was far away in thought from the events there recorded. So it was that I was astonished to discover within the elaborate wrappings of corrugated cardboard, wood-laths and thin paper the

case of instruments which I had last seen in a rebel stronghold in Basra.

In the rush of the weeks since I had been home I had almost forgotten the rebel chief and his promise. All this belonged to a distant, fantastic world that had lost much of its reality for me. Once or twice, in fact, when preparing for an operation I had sighed for some of the instruments the case contained, but the circumstances in which I had lost them rarely came to mind. And now here they were once more! It was an astonishing, almost unbelievable thing. By what devious route they had reached me I do not know to this day, and probably I never shall. No doubt if those instruments could speak they could tell a story of dark voyagings in the underworld of two continents that would put my own small adventures to shame. But that did not matter. Here they were once more, and as I set the case in its appointed place my room looked complete and fully familiar once more.

My unfinished notes lay on my desk, but I could no longer concentrate on them. If my body was in Harley Street, my double, that part of me which the wise old Egyptians called the *ka*, was hovering over the Pacific, looking with keen eyes on the tangled trouble which today is the Far East. The time had come when I could look back upon those months of variety with a clearer and more co-ordinated vision.

I do not set myself up as a politician, an ethnographer, or a Solomon who can solve all the world's troubles, and the thoughts I set down here—which, no doubt, the "experts" in their accustomed superiority will dismiss as "half-baked"—are no more than those which occur to a man whose interest has always lain more in people than in places, in human problems rather than in abstract conceptions, and whose qualifications for airing them are that he has travelled a good deal and has seen something of life from a good many different angles. So let it be.

The Pacific is a vast place and has many problems—political, economic, ethnological, cultural—and all are on as vast a scale as the background against which they are set. When such magnitudes are concerned, it is dangerous to generalise, for, after all, the very term "Pacific" as well as its ally "Far East"

is ill-defined and loose. Yet, for all that, it does seem to me that a few general thoughts emerge ; and it is just these which the experts, in their narrow concern with this or that speciality, are apt to overlook. It is the same in all things, not least in my own sphere of medicine, that the specialist tends more and more to work in a vacuum.

Above all else, it is obvious that, in the Pacific, the huge conglomeration of coloured peoples, from the primitive islanders, still, to all intents and purposes, in the Stone Age phase of culture, to the advanced and highly educated Indians, are in a state of violent resurgence. There has come to them a belief, sincerely, passionately, even violently, held, that the land in the Far East is their own heritage and that it belongs to them, and them alone.

That, indeed, is so obvious even to the stay-at-home if he reads the newspapers that it seems trite to state it ; yet it needs to be stated for it is the general pattern of the wood which is likely to be lost because of too close a study of the trees. And it is, I think, the one generalisation that cannot be disputed as a basic factor in the whole situation. The Indians differ among themselves about their future ; they have practically nothing in common as regards their problems and projected solutions with the islanders of the Pacific. Yet common to them all is this new, nascent creed that the East belongs to those who have been born there.

It is not, of course, entirely of post-war origin, though it is the events of the war years that have brought it so sharply to a head and speeded its growth so that it is already a tree that cannot lightly be uprooted. The native has been learning all these years from the white men who have come among them—white men of many different kinds and of widely differing ideals and motives. Some of them have imbibed all the white man's learning so they can compete with the European on his own ground, but even the illiterate have acquired something. What the white man is receiving today is a reflection of his own urges and ideals, their shape changed and altered by the mirror of the native mind, with its different traditions and training.

Since the days of Captain Cook and the great explorers, the Pacific has been the white man's playground. The white man's

civilisation has built up here, destroyed there. Sometimes it has paused in the act of destruction and turned to construction and salvation—as in the case of the Maoris of New Zealand, who, when on the point of extinction, have been saved by a change of governmental policy until they occupy today almost a position of privilege in the Dominion. The white man has exploited and commercialised, often buying valuable commodities for trifling gifts. He has degraded with his drink and his own particular civilised diseases ; no less, he has elevated by fighting the greater evils of primitive cultures and practices. He has bullied and coerced, stolen and given, driven hard bargains and acted generously. But always his ways have been different from those of the natives and have given a new slant to native thought and outlook.

In countries with a high proportion of educated natives, such as India, the revolt against the white man's hegemony set in many years ago, but even in such places it was the war that fanned the flames into an uncontrollable conflagration. There has always been an ambivalent attitude towards the white man in the east—on the one hand, he has been regarded as a trespasser and exploiter ; on the other, he has been looked upon as a protector. There were plenty enough—for the Asiatic has a strong streak of laziness in him and is always ready to let someone else do the hard work—who were ready to let it remain so. Their attitude was that if the white man took so much, he could pay it back by protecting the peoples from assault and war. For there has always been war of some kind going on somewhere among the islands, great and small.

Even before the war broke out there was already a rival to the white man. The Jap was making his weight felt. His ways were not, in many things, the ways of the white man. They were more often than not harsher and more exacting. Yet, also, because the Jap was an Asiatic with an Asiatic's outlook shot through with much that was primitive and irrational, these ways were more readily comprehended than those of the white man. The Jap spoke of a vague form of Pan-Asiaticism, "co-partnership in the east," which seemed to satisfy the new-born realisation that the lands of the east belonged to the natives ; and the glow of this verbal ideal obscured the fact that it was all a

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polite camouflage for Japanese dictatorship on a scale and severity that the worst periods of white colonization and development had never produced. Till the war came it remained as an amorphous dream, something that the Asiatic mind, which delights in psychiastic satisfactions, could play with at its leisure. Opposing its practical realisation was the thought that the all-powerful white man would almost contemptuously defeat any sort of Japanese challenge. The legend of the white man's omnipotence, a relic of the days when the white man with his guns and his machines was looked on as at least a demi-god, remained.

And then came the war. The Japs swept over Asia with the irresistibility of a tidal wave. So far from offering even the semblance of a challenge, the white man was overwhelmed. His strongest points—like Singapore—fell almost without resistance. This was the draught that stirred the smouldering spark into the dancing flame. The day of the white man was done. The yoke, so long endured, had been cast off at a single stroke, and the domination of the white man was seen to be nothing more than a fantasy which the peoples had mistaken for reality.

There was scarcely a territory throughout the vast Pacific where the Japs did not find supporters in strength—supporters who were willing to throw in their lot with the invaders, even when it was realised that the Japanese policy meant the imposition of a yellow dictatorship in place of a white overlordship. Perhaps they felt that domination by a people of their own continent was better than control by races essentially and completely alien.

It was not simply territories that the white man lost when the Japs surged forward after Pearl Harbour. Territories could be—and eventually were—recaptured. The greatest loss was prestige. No longer could the white man claim that he was offering complete protection to the native populations and hold himself and his ways up as a sure shield against misfortune. Truly the Colossus has proved to have feet of clay. And the Japs, with their innate cunning, realised that their conquest was richer in prestige than in land. They lost no opportunity of degrading the white man before the natives and exalting the natives over the white man. They held up the white man

as an interloper and thief and drew attention from their own atrocities and pillage by concentrating the native gaze upon the spectacle of the humiliated European and American.

So Asia came to be "freed." The reign of the white man was over for good and all. It did not matter that the native peoples had lost a hard master for a harder. The future could take account of itself—for "tomorrow" is something that primitive peoples especially do not consider overmuch. Let the morrow take care of itself. From the Land of the Rising Sun had come a New Dawn and a New Day.

Yet the end had not been reached. As the white man had been swept away so was the Jap to be—and in a manner far more convincing and complete. For the white man had merely withdrawn to gather strength for a renewed attack. When Japan fell, she was conquered and destroyed.

In that fact, I think, lies one, if not the fundamental, reason for the extraordinary confusion of thought one finds among educated natives in the Pacific and Far East. For a brief period they were freed of their subjection to the white man; they saw him exposed as human and with human weaknesses, just as themselves. But his return signalled that, in the end, his power was unlimited. And it is to this, I believe, though it may be merely misinformed fancy on my part, that one can ascribe the curious intensity of nationalist feeling and the passionate heat of uprisings and rebellions in this part of the world. The Jap conquest showed that the white man could be swept aside; that gave the native a new sense of power and equality. Yet the white man's return was a very formidable demonstration of strength. So it is that underlying the native separatist and independence movements are the remains of an inferiority complex compensating itself by over-aggressive assertions of equality. It is a familiar enough psychological picture which, in this case, is neither fanciful nor overdrawn.

The reality of the desire for freedom and equality in the Pacific cannot be doubted. It is something that has to be faced squarely, not only in the more developed countries like India and Burma, but everywhere. It is crystal clear that there can be no return to the old state of affairs which may be likened to one in which the new owner of an estate has taken on the former lessees as

privileged pensioners. The Japs used the word co-partnership as a blind for their own ends ; yet in it is the key to future peace and prosperity in Asia and the Pacific.

No greater mistake could be made than to continue thinking of the Pacific islands as little specks on the map that can be bargained about among the Great Powers, whether under the sacred names of " mandate " or " trusteeship " or acquired outright. From the governmental offices of Washington and Whitehall—and perhaps even, too, the Kremlin—the Pacific islands may appear no more than bases, mere counters in the great game of power politics and juggling with power balances. In one sense they may be, yet the day when that sort of thinking had any sort of reality about it is, if not completely past, at any rate dying rapidly.

On the map, even the larger of these islands looks insignificant. How unimpressive even a place like New Guinea looks on a globe beside the great land mass that is the United States or the U.S.S.R. ! In these matters, maps are a misleading guide. On each of those insignificant spots on the map are people ; and it is the people who matter. Those people have changed. They are conscious of a new dignity and a new purpose. They have lost their sense of complete inferiority, which at one time, was so impressed upon them that they were regarded as little more than a sub-species of man. Primitive they may be ; but the point is that today so many of them realise their primitiveness and are eager both to abandon it themselves and to lead their less enlightened fellows along the same path of progress.

Co-partnership—co-prosperity—those were the magic words the Japs used, and they have in them the right seed, if properly planted. There is today a need for a greater realisation of interdependence between East and West. Each needs the other. The islands of the Pacific are rich in those things on which western civilisation depends, and the Pacific needs a great deal that only the west can supply. I myself see the chief need of the Pacific in the less tangible and obvious of western exports—in education and medical services, for example. If the white man is to re-establish his claim to have a share in the richness of the Pacific he must conquer and throw out other and more terrible enemies than the Jap, the enemies that are always at war with mankind. There is ignorance to kill—the stark, savage ignorance of the

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primitive mind ; and with ignorance must go the last resistance to hygiene, which, in turn, must lead to the final victory over the great pandemic diseases of the Pacific, to which I have referred elsewhere.

At the moment, let it be confessed, the outlook for such co-operation on a basis of equality does not look over bright. The native is at present too assertive of his new claims for independence to believe that there is any alternative between his own complete freedom and isolation on the one hand and white domination on the other. The bitterness of the conflicts where there have been uprisings—as, for example, in the Dutch East Indies—is evidence of that. And there is a rooted antipathy to compromise among these peoples. They are traditional believers in the “all or none” principle. A nation is either a conquered or a conquering race, and there is no room for partners in the same land. It is only by practical example in those territories which the white man will continue to administer that this simple belief can be overcome.

It is only on looking back on my trip that I can see these things. At the time, the problems looked entirely unconnected and insuperable. Religions and quasi-religions, cultures, traditions—all are so different as between place and place that one can scarcely believe in a common denominator to which all may be referred. Yet I am convinced that there will be no solution of the troubles in the Far East and the Pacific until the problem is reviewed as a whole and not piecemeal—a problem that, while the solution may have to be differently applied in different parts, has yet a unifying principle underlying it, the greatest principle of all, which is the right of every individual, white, yellow, black, or red, to be free and not dominated by another race or any creed but that which he adopts of his own free will.

In the ultimate solution of this problem—something in which I sincerely believe—many nations and peoples must play a part. The United States will probably have the preponderating influence in the Pacific in the near future, and the day of British hegemony may be passing. Yet not entirely. For Australia has an inalienable right to a say in what is happening in the Pacific, and so, too, has New Zealand ; and that fact is reassuring for those who believe that there is something worth saving and nurturing in the many native cultures of the islands. New Zealand's treatment of

the Maoris has often been quoted as an outstanding example of what should be done with native peoples, and it would be a fine thing indeed if a similar spirit could be applied throughout the whole vast length and breadth of the Pacific.

Yes, it is a huge problem, and the more one looks at it the more complicated it seems. New facets present themselves continuously for consideration. And it is that very fact, that seeming unending variety, which, to my mind, makes it so necessary to dig down to the roots to find out the single shoot from which all stem. When that is done one is far less likely to be dazed and dazzled by the changes of the Pacific kaleidoscope.

My mind returned from the Pacific and I realised once more that I was alone in my room and that the hour was late—long past the hour at which I normally leave Harley Street. I looked out of the window and saw that it was raining—a steady downpour from a murky sky, very different from the sunshine I had just been revisiting in the spirit. My eyes roved round the room and rested for a moment on the case of instruments that had so miraculously returned to me. The sight brought my wandering thoughts nearer home. It was not only in the remote Pacific that there were these problems of man against man, race against race, creed against creed. They existed, too, on the doorsteps of Europe and even in Europe itself, the war of isms and ideologies, all springing from the fallacy that there is one right and one wrong applicable to all peoples, all ways of life.

How pathetic is that belief! Day by day people come to me with afflictions and illness, some trivial, some serious. They have been doing so for many years now, yet never so far have I found any two of them exactly alike. Each is an individual. None can be neatly tagged and fitted into a scheme of classification as Type A or B or C . . . The world is made up of such disparities. How, then, can there be a golden rule that all of them shall find acceptable?

And that, I think, is the greatest lesson that travel has to teach. Whether one's voyages be set against the brilliant backcloth of the Pacific islands or the sombre, age-mellowed cities of Europe; whether one looks out on to the skyscrapers of New York or sees nothing but a few figures black against the whiteness of the Arctic snows, one learns that men are always men, no two alike, an

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infinite pattern of variety. And, because of that, no two of them ever see quite the same thing. I have looked out on the Pacific scene and shared in the adventures it has to offer. Another man might see something wholly different—and written a very different book. I might even share his journey and still differ from him in all things. It is that which makes remote places like the Pacific islands so utterly strange and exciting—and at the same time so thoroughly familiar. That is probably the greatest lesson I learnt in that year among the islands.

EPILOGUE

It is not easy to write a travel book—though some critics might acidly remark that I have had so much experience I should not have any difficulties. But each time I set out to put down a record of my goings and comings I find myself up against the same old problems, doubts, and misgivings. And when, at last, I reach the final pages I am always obsessed by a feeling of uneasiness that I have said much that should never have been written and left out more that would have been better set in its place.

Now, having begun the epilogue of this book, I glance back at its chapters and experience the same doubts. How much better, I think to myself, if I had written it to a different plan, if I had related this adventure instead of that one! And I find to my surprise that I have omitted some of the things I made a special note to include, while recounting other experiences that I had registered a mental vow should be kept secret. But it is always so. If I had followed the scheme that now seems better to me, I should still have these doubts. There is no perfect way of writing a travel book, for it is a thing of mood and time and place recalled in very different circumstances.

As for this book, it so easily might never have been written—but not because my doubts were stronger than usual. No; it might never have come to be for the very adequate reason that its author so nearly projected his journey from the Antipodes to Paradise—or, it might be, the other place.

The story of that is one of those things which I had made up my mind to include in these pages and which I now find I have omitted. So let it be set down here if only to show that that destiny of mine which I have so often accused of ruthlessness does sometimes smile sunnily upon me. But perhaps in this case it was not my own personal fate but my wife's.

I have promised to tell in another book the story of my Australian adventures, and this belongs, properly I suppose, to that book. For all that it will not be out of place.

My lecture tour in Australia was over, and I was about to pay

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a visit, with my wife, to Tasmania. The offers of a University appointment had made me, for some obscure reason which only those versed in the journalistic scale of news values will understand, some sort of a figure of interest. And this proved fortunate, in a variety of ways, though it had also its compensating disadvantages.

Its greatest immediate advantage was that, for the time being, it exalted me to the rank of a V.I.P.—a Very Important Personage. Airlines are as short of capacity in Australia as in other parts of the world, and one is fortunate indeed to obtain a seat.

Without much hope I went to the booking-office to ask about reservations. My reception took my breath away. As soon as I mentioned my name, it was as though a magic spell had been pronounced. Mouths framed from habit to phrases about priorities and waiting lists, about delays and provisional bookings only, relaxed into smiles of welcome and even of deference—or as much of deference as the sturdy Australian individualism will allow. Certainly they would see what could be done . . . and at once. And when the clerk returned from a conference with the mysterious gods who determine these things he brought with him astonishing news. For it turned out that the State Government had heard of my wish to visit Tasmania and had issued a recommendation that I was to be given every facility as one of its guests. . . . I could have dreamed of nothing luckier.

In two days' time, I was told, there would be seats for my wife and myself. I was issued with tickets—which, to my further astonishment, I was told would be charged to the State—and asked to be at the airport in good time. Everything was going so smoothly that I wondered whether I was really and truly awake.

There was no cancellation. On the contrary, I received a polite reminder that it would be considered a favour if I would be early at the airport. It was not until I had obeyed this strange request, so insisted upon, that I realised its significance. For I found that my status as a V.I.P. (temporary) was being fully recognised. On the tarmac were microphones, and courteous, though anxious-looking, officials of the Broadcasting Commission invited me to speak into the instruments.

It was rather a shock to me, for I was quite unprepared. But I did my best and, whether through politeness or otherwise, the

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engineers and interviewers expressed themselves as thoroughly satisfied. The ordeal was over and now nothing remained but to board the aeroplane and occupy the seats which had been reserved for my wife and myself.

Now came the moment when my good luck appeared to have deserted me. One of the most agitated airway officials I have ever seen—they are commonly a class of beings whom nothing, from large-scale crashes to temperamental cargoes of pet birds, seems to ruffle—approached me and asked me to step into the office. Wonderingly, I did as I was requested. Surely, I thought, something serious had happened.

He seemed at a loss how to begin. There had been a slip somewhere—he was careful not to assign responsibility to anyone. The bookings had been made without reference to the cargo manifests and . . . he hesitated.

“Do you mean to say,” I demanded, trying to keep my temper in check, “that we can’t travel?”

He nodded, in some confusion. “Well, doctor,” he said, “it’s rather difficult to explain. There are two vacant seats on the plane . . .”

“Then why,” I roared, for I felt really enraged now, “can’t we have them? Has the Governor-General decided to travel or what?”

“No, sir, the seats are reserved for you,” he returned quickly with an air of dawning panic. “They are reserved in your name. It’s—it’s . . .”

“Out with it, man!” I cried. “Come on. Don’t beat about the bush.”

“Well, you see, sir, it’s—it’s yourself. We’ve just checked up and you are—er—a little overweight. There’s room for two—er—normal people, but not for yourself and your wife without overloading the plane.”

This sounded preposterous to me, and I said so in unmeasured terms, cursing by and large the inefficiency of the Australian airways and all its works. But he persisted. Nothing would move him. I was a large man, and my weight was excessive. There were, of course, alternatives. I could fly alone, and my wife could follow. She could travel, and then they could accommodate one normal-sized passenger extra, but not myself. He

seemed about to suggest a whole host of possible permutations and combinations, as though he were an English football-pool fan, when I cut him short.

"Then what it means," I said, "is that my wife and I can't travel together today. If we don't, when can we travel?"

"Tomorrow," he replied. "We can arrange that faithfully."

There it had to be left, but I spent a little more time telling him exactly what I thought of the situation. I had broadcast. My departure had been publicised. Now, thanks to their muddling, I was to be made a public laughing stock. And I added a few comments on the quality of their machine if it could not stand a few pounds overload such as I represented.

He mouthed apologies. In reality, he explained, it would be quite safe, but the regulations had to be observed; they could not be broken even for the Governor-General himself.

Disgruntled, feeling every variety of a fool, I retired. There was an hotel of a sort on the airport and we were given to understand that we had the free run of it. The whole affair was scandalous. It had been a severe blow, especially as everything had been running so smoothly.

We sat in the lounge, too disappointed even to read. Pilots and airline officials, officers of the R.A.A.F., and mere passengers, moved in and out, but we barely noticed it. And then a squadron-leader I had already met crossed over to me and bent down confidentially.

"It looks as though you were in luck to-day, doc.," he remarked "We had a good laugh over it—I didn't think you were all that heavy—but maybe the laugh's on you now."

"How do you mean?" I asked, sitting up abruptly. I did not like the grave look on his face.

"They've lost the kite," he replied. "Radio's been working like mad trying to pick her up, but it's just dead. I can't imagine that the set would break down in this time."

"Well, I hope it's only that," I commented.

The hours passed, and that tense gloom which settles over places expecting to have bad news descended on the whole airport. People tip-toed in and out of the lounge. Men drank in absolute silence at the bars and, each time the door opened, everyone looked up in the expectation of information.

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Still the clock ticked on. The plane was overdue now, and there had not been a whisper. Tragedy brooded over us.

And then the squadron-leader approached me again. "I was right, doc.," he remarked seriously. "Your luck was right in. The inbound plane's just reported by radio that she's sighted wreckage—and not far off the coast at that."

I nodded soberly. There was nothing I could say.

By morning the story was pathetically complete—far more complete than the stories of most crashes. The aeroplane had, it seemed, dived straight into the sea without warning. There had been no survivors and, so far as the experts' preliminary examination was concerned, the crash was a complete technical mystery.

Yes, my luck had been right in, as the officer had said.

The full story of that crash was reported in the newspapers of the world. It was a grim and horrible story.

Grim and horrible—yes ; but for me and my wife specially so. I shudder even now when I think of it. Suppose my blustering and hectoring had gained my end, and the pilot had consented to carry an overload, regulations or no regulations ? Suppose . . .

But it had not turned out like that. My wife and I made the crossing in perfect safety and comfort the next day, though not without trepidation.

Perhaps it is the first time in my life that I have been grateful for my bulk. Often I have felt it an encumbrance and a handicap. Yet but for my fifteen stones I should not be writing these words. I should have gone on a longer journey than a tour of the Pacific isles. And there would have been no book, for those regions I missed can never be the subject-matter of travellers' tales such as I have set down here.

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